The Martingale

Darrell Berry

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...a softening of the heart, an admission of the inefficacy of
our glassy essence against the awe of strangeness.

Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication

John Durham Peters

זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם

Genesis 5:1

I.

In Eden

In Eden, God is talking. All the snails are here, attending; all the other animals.

Eve, distracted, rubs her hand absently over the rough bark of the newest tree, harder and harder, until a thin trail of blood runs the length of her arm. Holding her hand in his, Adam licks the blood away, running the warmth of his mouth up from her elbow, kissing closed the wound in her hand.

The Martingale

& I will always play the martingale.

After the Deep, the shallows; as
when steward of Eden, I was compelled to let the land lay fallow
after the first blooms fell.

I am, no longer, the keeper of secrets. But there is now no
room between here and heaven
                for what there is to tell. This is true:
the name God gifts me
cuts sharp as glass, and burns hot as the last fire of first love burns.

& the unsung word in its standing flame is endless rain
on this empty sea.

Lions

We lead the lions last to the slotted ramp. The other animals are restless. They, like us, feel the imminent, wish the door closed, the dark sealed in with their familiar smells. The lions are quiet, reach into the air with soft muzzles, tasting the lowering dark. We lead them onboard. The shallow ark shakes under their heavy paws.

On the East Slope

With maps carefully drawn, the love of God a stain of gold on our hearts, climbing the last wall of ice, the keel deep in snow over us, the looming shadow of the frozen hull.

With ropes and hooks, pitons and knives driven deep in the timber, hauling ourselves to the deck, packs and flares cached in a cleft of the rock lower. The door, closed, shut, we found, with the ice chipped away, fastened inside by wide metal bars.

Crowbars prising, lamps lit, descending wooden stairs to the three levels of the hold, the six of us shivering, lamplight shrinking in this ark of bones.

The Great Lake

Flood, is what water does, left to itself the little longer you left it here.

Perhaps you thought a covenant
of containment

would do it, without the doing: would be vessel enough?

In a way, yes,

but for the spilling.

Didn't you have a word that would hold the water, in?
Or only some other vessel, for yours alone to ride it out?

Regardless,

it was not your
flood

that took mine, they were
lost, all, long after; into what you left, after the rainbow:

into the Great Lake

of consequence without intent

2.

First Light

Through slow glass,
what I see through to [on its other side
happened last week, or never. I press my nose
against this image, the glass is cold, mists over.

You too
are anxious, though you never speak of this. We touch

fingers

to the same pane,
frosting the vision, uncertain in this [& as in
what we give of pleasure:
the pressure back into the deep leaves. And trusting
no more of the vision than this.

Weave a circle three times: walk widdershins: speak the words.
There is nothing there
of what ever was, or ever might have been:

the morning you wake alone, you reach beside you, clasping nothing
rose petals scatter, fall upwards in half light,

unreal, unseen

三丁目

There is small life everywhere,
        mice beneath the tracks in the
subway, cicadas and crows
brim the dark trees with noise

all these

intercalary days no diary holds nor held. I lean my
        head against cold
        metal, she is making jasmine tea in her small kitchen.
Everywhere, the sensual presses in. On

the ridge of
the roof, a black cat is walking in the rain, shakes

the falling silver
from its fur.

Albion Drive

the winter was, with blades
of ice
over Hackney Road,
there,
several times, a Xiqu perfection
you might have lost, later, in the ground of the general —

the blossoming of things

from their stems out — [mistaking

for the old winter
the new growth frozen, by a glance too brief
to catch the shift] had we not seen

these lantern pearls; these sky-blue filigrees
of steel:
walking Sunday from Spitalfields,
, white
wings, all this laddering
of layers: no copper joint holds heaven
here to all that falls, this imprecise
colourfield
of broken walls; near Albion Drive, this purple
skyburst of climbing herbs.

(Something like the song)

cabbage roses
or the moon. & pollen in the air.

This also the way home; &
tho the boughs are low
    and you must crawl,

                                you
    feel the dust. Of itself,   you are
        dust. Of iron, stars.   wherever

where the dust is from:
a fault in the nothing
weighs down the light.

love, tell me again, what it is
we know & do not know.

these leaves, since
late September
heaped, are thrown —
love given, ever against the
chill of this season:

what this place, made bonfire-lit for this occasion
    serves between

[is suddenly shown.

区24

Though we meet late, near the Marusho supermarket there are small children with bicycles under the eaves. The only other metal in the night, is from the night's own hoard, showered wide over all under it, & through every surface. She plucks a flower + gives it to me, and she is thinking *I will be with him, I will be there*, her caryatid thoughts forcing upwards a space against the dark beneath which I walk uncomfortably home, the wet flower in my hand.

Loira Road

The year
rises from empty May; fills with gold.

Reach out, asking
        where are these enormous bees from, in the heather

                strumming forgotten things.

The child brings these secrets home. Beyond this door the house is falling: a late-winter eternity of dove-blue rooms.

Stars pool on the broken floor.

The white pulse of the
ghost's hand draws him. (though not the dead:

                the future echo of a life difficult as flowers has its own power.

She takes his hand:

'I will stay the harvest, but will leave you nothing'. In the field, they lie together, under the perfect corn.

Notley Fern Gorge

I know these unsettled places

& their unsettled dead,

I am bush-born.

Beyond that, even.

Home haunts here,
with the stones turned nothing,
nothing but that which turns against, & again / against.

& you come: and you are each of you [every one of you] many,

& yet with all your bindings
to words and time, and to the body, [and to that binding you are also bound

you are barely here at all, where here is,
and I can scarcely make you out
against your own

or

against any

other light

Redbill Point

The face of the wave, rising
becomes a wall and then the sky

Then here the wave is falling.

You need not fear, though the terrible absence —
    the dark under the wing,
    water,
    the lonely breakfast in sunlit rooms —

though it comes, life is brief /& pleasure.

Remain and then leave

in this moment or another,

as you will

Etoile

we are, for a summer, or for summer and a day,

a shell involute, or amber: form itself, a reach

beyond reach, a thing which is to life

as bee's purple is to apical violet; sky beyond sky

&

Bataille got it:
I cannot regard you other than through
this deceit of mirrors

Or be burnt, ravaged, transformed.

& all such rehearsals, vanity: wax and wings.

I love you in a dazzle of haecceity — all that will burn, aflame

[&: I lose you

to contingent, casual disregard: your addresses changed so many times; I am with you nowhere.

Etoile

& seeing everything, suddenly again together in one place,
, having seen
the same shadow set

the third time over the house,

counting the days backwards, it is the same,

here as ever. On the table the poetry is grapes half darkened; a word I could not read was written by your name; I had half

forgotten you.

& if, of at the lake, your hair wet, turning, I remember

indistinct, as water

is in water waves only

those small birds asleep, only surface, yet flex that memory by
even their little weight, & later

when

with all the houses dark,

you were beside me, sleepless, &
by the river,

something crosses the long slope of the hill

Clayton Tunnel

for a mile on the line through
        diatomaceous chalk, it is as if

between Hassocks and home, in that
brief heavy darkness, it is that day again, with you

stepping over
the boards of that Fairlight (Series 3) [without context
scattered along the hallway,

& as you
open the door

all the light is drawn down the hill from the Heath.
& all the hours fall open —

that is nothing of significance, the boy whispers: [although
        occupied between his
        lovers and his gods, he is himself
        nothing. Not even water in the chalk.]

      & yet he follows you here, two breaths and all these years
          behind you, again into the same infolding light.

Stone Song

where the garden starts, (or ends), the stone
is treebark-grey, and tall,
but on this page lies flat: unparseable, as death is. Implausible as death is.

Unpassable as death is.

Yet all the autumn
rain still greens the grass, my love

& as your song
makes shown
what grows is love
before (& impossibly, past) the impassable stone.

The Silver Braid

The first week I knew of
you, on that Wednesday, at a bus stop outside Australia Square,

you were,
in my mind,

    a kundalini helix of light;

you were,
      also

what there was, when — as a child, being as I was
outside the farmhouse, & under the winter armature of stars:
      Kappa Crucis overhead, Orion low
— the silver braid so bright, gifts me
for the first time,

      shadow [knowing world, impossibly
present, inconceivable: distant.

but you were here, *right here*, back at that Danks Street apartment:
already, a gradient of potentials being knit [fearfully and wonderfully
made; wet informatics at its work against time: both psalm

and helix, held.

      / you, where

you are. & the shadow, (the knowing, the singleness) yours

The Same Hill

The hill, is of rocks, snakes sunning, the calico bag you left there,
        the old heat; summer
hazes the day over with wasps and flowers.

I reach my hands out, my shadow stretched out hard under the same low sun. Sun, turn and

        set;

Carnival sun, set and splinter.

Bury these
embers, under the same hill; burning.

I bring your bag home; spill the sand
the rocks are of, on the parquet of
the wilderness the world is.

Your voice from the other room
repeats — though inexactly — what

        with precision

the world says:

stay.

FW3/25 Studland

My children in the rock pools just before the point, as the striated light leads a fledging gull's flight; kelp tangles my toes, (& my girl has lost her shoes along the strand as the yachts tack fast, & past the white hotel dip Ravilious buoys. Eliot tells her 'the world is likely to end right now', and she says 'then wave if you love me', & he keeps on, climbing barefoot and sandy, past the sign: *please keep to path, glass in roped off area*, as the light slants long and thin across the headland chalk.

On Ditchling Beacon

In the field, fresh-furrowed, find

ear-pressed,

its clamour

the sun is white noise falling;

the earth hardens,

the Aspect of this day is necessity: hoof and thorn and all that falls, all smashed together against the slab of light, that life is, [&

with such candescence!

& with Love its only Law

s

50°/51′/0″ N

God grows the green into the kelp of this world.

Of the other world, there is

nothing known: from the furling sea kale, borrow, borrow

as the compass dips towards Architeuthis
& the deep bells

all, against entropy;

everything, all kept,
all beyond the reach of God.

The Ace of Cups

I meet the Devil in his dream.
In his game: the test of Losing
        and of Gaining,
he holds the cards I gave him close,
& never plays the hand he holds: I am left before him, waiting
so many years:
I can not recall which cards I gave,
but can read the four I'm dealt:

The *Hanged Man*
who sees himself as almost God,

is not:

    is vegetal;

    is as Fruit and Flower is, fallen

    and just as fast to rot; *The World* not his to save.

The *Ace of Cups* spills endless love,
& with before *The Wheel*, the grave —

$\delta(x)$

it's that ruined light

silent from above: the Tavira road,
walking back, bags heavy

& later at the quinta with

the rain all around, the fire lit, when it's
all & only, in any moment, desire & form

convolved
& with mind as only one path of many, its harrow swept
across the surface
the cut of it crosses:

and it's you all still asleep, upstairs, in your various beds, &

with on the table, polvo de escabeche, pão, vinho verde;

the geese, wood smoke
coiling,

the woodpile,
all the shadows of the wind.

Cascade

At the door, these are fading shapes.
Fading, they become distant. Shapes, they become silence heaped. Is anything left
of such low fidelity ghosts,
after the drift, once
we audit the whole of
what the loom wove, and find the unwinding stars remain the same single unchallenged awkward measure of things? A cascade of gems
from love’s tangling weave all torn.

پادزهر

It gets in at the margins, then

the stone-marrow seeps
through this cut
        in the art,

& petrescence creeps into

the bulk.

'A formal device'

But you would say the same

if the process was instead sublimation,
& if at its end there
was nothing left: not this bezoar,
none of this at all —

nothing at all, with nothing at all

left for you to judge.

Aura

The further north, the more fragile the fixtures by which the stars are held, until at the pole itself, they break from the finest of wires by their own weight.

I snuff the wick. Nor'east the wrack, the dark snow, high stardust drifts, settles. The sails burn: the hull slides under ice, under and into this raining light.

The Limit

I get sober so fast, and wake
Face down, hand stuck tight, wrist-deep in Pólya's urn.

East Croydon 22-10-96

Under the strip lights
here; it is me, and the Iranian girl I met hours into the queue, talking:

1. Merleau-Ponty (I am reading *Phénoménologie de la perception*, in translation, to pace the wait),
2. the rift: the place of unseeing being;
3. the third thing, and
4. the kairos.

And we go through this,
in the great loop.

At her party the following Friday,
I hold my drink, & the waves come as waves. The sun has plowed; its gold
now buried deep
motions the becoming. The lanterns are lit. There is no
jazz
in the chikhai bardo.

Salmoning

You climb the river,

the ladder of vortices, you were good,

really, best best

at that one thing,

— to find where the energy could only

lift, and get in there & re-emerge

from the spinning

upwards

through so many lives in a life that it's almost

stupid

to enumerate. Was up and through, was

out

to some next new place where you could be

that next thing that you needed that energy for;

How you managed to stay at least *stationary*, in the flux of things, and

how you knew how to

look for long enough to be, & when

to leap

Vessels

i. (井の頭恩賜公園)

ink

that in five lines becomes
a bunch of nettles, in the night points one step north — where
the colour of water gets
    over the road,
    over the pearl of the three-quarter moon, gets in after —

(before the first thought

& all the gold
was birdsong over
/& through the heat; the same fading of the same echo of metal striking
again
the same bell.

ii. (新年会平成5年)

On the vine, life in clusters;
gathers of grey fur;
rough-thread-bound blind
mayfly eternity.

Behind the mirror, winter.
2 voices —
wind at the door.

Finer

i

nostalgia
invests clear water with lucent purl.

In its blue enigma other maps are turned
white sails : thrown high, all
familiar flooded things, also
the hyacinthine,
the amaranthine, amongst
dead leaves & copper bells.

In Ponto-cho, or in Upper Street
I am drunk in the firework of this night: words, all crocodile chalk, all
cluster; canticle of birds, all useless speech in the perfect dark
to reprise the unreturning,

I am
here, always here — anxious for
the change in it: the rising sign, the finder,
the flower of stillness.

ii

The fallen sweetness of the rose once
promised a different end to summer;
the lilac by the open door, persimmon and honeydew,
ferment of sweetness; fresh figs —

all distraction become the moment: ten years not lost or gone
but given, you can not cage in the circle of hands; the broken hologram
rose.

In Sanjou after soft rain, snow. In
receiving postcards, answers are set tokens:

love

is real.

iii

We are brought forward
through an arabesque of errors, to where we started, & what remains:
the spine, the spire: the span
that holds the form to one form. The fire.

At this turning the lake reflects nothing that is over it, this fallen tree
bleeds sand and sap,

the chain of gold around the sun is
hope abandoned:

I cannot stretch the skin of another day its cover, nor recover its sense.

Those we loved lead us, bringing forgotten gifts
they no longer understand,
that we follow them. After us the road is empty.

cordons de la eternidad;
silence impenetrable as speech,

knowing words cannot past the triumph of the carnival
at the nine gates
reach,
are inadequate compass to find what
we had thought so simple, lost so near, that they might suffice, from here
to here.

iv

In my garden, under Orion and the new moon, I plant
cardamom and coriander, caraway, saxifrage,
sweet basil, horehound, lavender; burying the carnival.

bury this also, finer into the same earth
that we may find, though later, the flower of stillness.

Snow yet piles.

& (its silver bowl

末法の歌

And you asked me: to whom does it fall, if not to us, to write
songs the machines will sing in the dawn of their uplift?

Whose, if not ours,
the aubade: the ochre, the ascent?

Coda

There are three things made of metal in this room; count them: first this knife, here on the tray, that cut these apples. Second, these coins. Third, this ring she gave me, never yet removed. This, the first lie: there are many things made of metal in this room, and no time to count them. Come, look, here through this doorway, quick, look:

the city already burning.

3.

The Garden

Hard sharpness

claw

my hoof, great
elephant hooves paws

tender hands

        tendrils, rise!

Claws! &
how all this lonely loveliness, [how

        the world lies between

        here and the world

is, in & of itself,

the wire in the rose

The Nest

the snow
was one day heavy
in the yard

-- light, stealing

fingers over leaves,
coarse grasses : blossom
under snow, shaken.

here are houses,
seen from above;
here, these days: separate as stones.

such division of substance: salt / harbour / sand.
buoys & bells dwell
in the swell
of a neap tide that fails

while now,
with my beak I pluck and weave these heavy reeds

Analemma

Winter

I sleep the winter.

Spring

Nightly after their murmuration, they come down to me, & lead me to the shadow court of Jack-of-Gold, the corvid king: to the patch of dust and moonlight where they say I was conceived. They tell me their stories of my life, bright eyes unblinking, then wait. 'Sing' they whisper, 'sing your song'. But I have no song to sing. Again they wait, then fly, laughing: 'Not tonight, my love, not tonight'.

Summer

I have seen knots done well (though being such as I am, cannot myself do them thus): rope becomes more than rope, to hold each held thing, high over its own deep spring. With what skill I have, I knot these words to lift the summer sky a little higher over the land, and make my way home, to my warm burrow and the berries I have picked from the low branches, up on the greening hill; and all the honey from the hives.

Autumn

Autumn has touched the soil. Its gold rises through the finest filaments to edge the leaves over us. Leaving my burrow, I am already rising. Everything rises, everything asks the same question, quietly, of what remains in these late September days.

Jacques d'Or

When woken

strong-pinioned, my wings

Open, bright black as night is.

They furl, and my eyes

Open, they are gold

as treasure.

I am

of lost things, King. In

this place, I am

antecedent of stars.

Cat Of the Mountains

Here I sit above
the unforced unfolding

beneath me,
shell within shell, I feel

all the shells of the earth, in orbit
below my paws.

Above, the improbable
, celadon sky.

The New Forest

As far north as Croydon the land, where it tears,
is chalk: the sea is near.

On your perch above the stanchions at Shad Thames,

wait, patient:
until a new forest of estuarine kelp wilds the Upper & Lower Pools,

seals sun
on a raft of lamina between Jacob Island & St. Saviour's Dock

& blue crabs swarm
the
City Farm on the Isle of Dogs.

Bright petalled,
flowers stroke the belly of the tide.

London is thrown against the sky in grey and silver;

longingly, this day begins in all places.