

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.

Of Origins

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.

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.

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.



2.

Of Memory Fields & Residua

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,

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

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.

☒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 store, 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.

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.

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.

ii

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.

iii

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

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.

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 — it depends, I guess), 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.

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.

South Coast

1. *Storm-damaged path (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.

2. *South Downs*

& they are dancing, in the fire in the sun on the hill. The armature turns; 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; set and splinter. Bury it under these hills burning, the sky all white with stars.



3.

Of Language & Limits

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 —

2 plateaux

鏡

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.

影

À la porte, ce sont des formes qui s'effacent.
En s'effaçant, elles deviennent lointaines.
Formes, elles deviennent silence amassé.
Reste-t-il quelque chose
de ces fantômes de basse fidélité,
après la dérive, une fois
que nous avons audité tout
ce que le métier à tisser a tissé, pour découvrir
que les étoiles qui se défont demeurent
la seule mesure maladroite et incontestée
de tout? Une cascade de gemmes,
déversées des fils du tissu d'amour s'entremêlant, déchiré.

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.

The Limit

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

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.



4.

*Of Animals, Ruin,
& On Being Witness*

The Garden

Hard sharpness
claw
my hoof, great
elephant hooves paws

tender hands

tendrils, rise!

Claws! & O

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 thus, cannot myself do them well): 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.

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.

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.

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 the uplift?

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

Coda

The bell boils in its fittings, in the third second, gone.

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.



5.

Other Maps

The Over-Round

Clearings

1. Being unfolds as an open field of potentiality, the native drift of which is dispersal.
2. Presence instantiates as a clearing: local order enabled by active comportment (attention, remembrance, craft).
3. Every clearing is time-bound; once its sustaining comportment weakens, its ordered sense unravels and is reabsorbed into diffuse potentiality.

Bearing Witness

1. Disclosure draws its force from the tension between the revelatory and occluding powers of speech.
2. Bearing-witness is world-constituting: it shapes an intelligible domain within the open field.
3. The strength of witness lies in attentional depth and precision, not in duration.

Frames

1. Episodic memory gathers traces of multiple clearings and re-projects them in recombinant form; the horizon that holds these projections together is a frame.
2. Memory is recombinant rather than archival. Each frame is therefore a fresh configuration: provisional, perspectival, and liable to dissolve when attention shifts.
3. Across clearings, iterative replication and selective retention recurrently re-instantiate similar motifs; recognised within a frame, these motifs form constellations.
4. Coherence emerges as a statistical inevitability of replication-selection dynamics: evident to the framing gaze yet mute to consciousness situated inside a single clearing.
5. Frames are themselves higher-scope clearings and may fold into wider frames in a recursive architecture of sense-making. Constellations are likewise, recursively, of constellations.

Poesis

1. Dispersal tends toward oblivion.
2. Poetic praxis, by intensifying witness, momentarily arrests dispersal and illumines constellations.
3. Each act of witness is irreducibly singular yet co-inhabits an atemporal constellation of structurally resonant clearings; the linkage is configurational, not sequential.

