

Richard O. Moore

CHECK POINT

“Lord, when shall we be done changing?”
Herman Melville - letter to Nathaniel
Hawthorne, November 17, 1851

Assembled in faded garments of our words
a century's splintered aftermath
tabbed for retrieval pressed
between the mind's eye and the heart's desire
a collision of forgetfulness
and a desperate “need to know”
without compassion meaning
collapses like a wall whose building
has been bombed rubble falls in upon itself
lodged in the debris of particulars
disposable truths : political reality : nothing
flows easily : not water : not fire
not even our sacred envelope of air.

We have brought our bloodland ways
into a century we shall not outlive
opened sores upon this body of earth

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Area bombardment · Aerial bombing of cities · Terror bombing · V-weapons

Into a void always on download
faith into faith all structures of belief
trembling not one wall left unshaken.

Say, "Tea kettle or dying animal"
rhetoric against the house arrest
of age nettle sting of memory
that in an old man loses out to sleep.

What is the past but a failed retrieval
of what at the time seemed relevant and true
arriving through a tangle of dendrites
an invasion of beta-amyloid as reported
in The New York Times and hardening to dogma
-- mumble mumble mumble pop --
at last you have explained it all.

"If I want the door to turn
the hinges must stay put."
not that a life depends upon it
but that it works that way the door
remains closed and the hinges quiet.
A wolf within escapes his chain
and shows his teeth and claims his turf.

"Set keel to breakers," that optimistic metaphor
and with it the voyage itself until a full circle of the horizon
reveals nothing as in fog this blindness is my inheritance
marginal at best mostly memory and flat-out inability
a distorting lens as with a winter's storm that hurls water
against the west-facing windows obliterating hillside
ocean and a bent wild gesturing tree
at one time I would have walked the cliff pretending
to be closer to the event but not now I'd stumble
into another metaphor : Old Man Lost in a Storm.

Gimbal broken and the compass lost
a different equilibrium arrives off-center
and never for a frozen moment real
but grown tipsy with reality an overdose of self
with fluid navigation points, false poles
of a non-navigable world.

It is a misdirected enterprise to call upon the dead for wisdom
we have their words but the speakers are just that: dead
along with their enfeebled gods and ghostly shrines
yet the sword slices the same meat of the same animal
that fought at Troy and the ghost that rushes from us is the same.

We have our seasons and our instruments of perishable joy
our shadow metaphysic of the transient soul
our virtual realities dislodge the arbitrary gods.
We build our temples with the stones at hand.

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So *mon lecteur* if you insist upon truth at least admit that it must be made up not lying there in wait like a golf ball or an explorer with vision just before death in turn made up by a biographer whose mind was made up before the first sight of snow freedom is all you've got poor thing watch how the local *supermercado* appears infinite to the explorers to those with little or nothing at all : your famine is on TV and what if your *truths* insists upon equality where are you then in the made-up language tour? Cruelty and self-destroying pain need not be delivered by your hand to work their best there are always others for that job "they do it to themselves" is what you'll say yesterdays truths are physics out of date and unemployable but for the moment relax and look outside : storms "batter" the north coast spousal abuse Poseidon Slugs Mother Earth not exactly : Poseidon no longer sells although Odysseus under many an alias is alive as any of the written- up immortals on the page meanwhile attend to the morning shopping list check out TV for rape earthquake and war oh! And don't forget sports with its mortgage points they cost money and why not you'll pay : the ball is in your court dearie decide on a leveraged forehand or an overhead smash too late! the ball that you let go just caught the line its game at love the umpire says and little mirror-face if this won't choke your chicken you'll need a taleteller like Shaun or the other one Shem for after all you are the living breathing tongue-tied son thereof what? Ho? Those bats have come again to show just *you* the entry/ exit of what may become your only shelter a survival kit is what you'll need but it won't last long comprised as it is of old assumptions dead you'll need new words for night and strangers armed with all that you don't have switch-a-rooney : tonight's game is the Barbarians versus the Hunkers as a fan watch for rats beneath the seats it adds a certain edge as the pawns are moved : robed Sisters of Mercy care for this crowd long past their hour of bedtime leave theology for what gets trashed avoid contamination the plague changes in fashion tb aids : your flaming cross shows off fresh metal teeth.

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You keeper of coins and keys press on with that cart one wheel not tracking hard to steer pick up some beer some bread some low-fat cheese and split this market for the great and green outdoors : a fast track stimulus/response has brought this jay that you see to this specific tree troubles you doesn't it that you matter not one feather to that bird : mon voyeur : my Wordsworth : please don't mutter teleology like a heathen spell it ill becomes you to speak in tongues all tied together in one noisy lot like jays but hey! comparisons don't wash today so don't be frightened if the walls seem greener than they were before a rainy Tuesday you may recall but that word's not important what's in a name? not much but maybe more than you'll admit like your passport picture that can't possibly be you with that silly smile : nameless you do a modern kind of harm move-on old tool-user to the next aisle it's clear that a balanced checkbook exchange will not turn this trick flatten the hills straighten the curves be intimate as earth and air : nonsense once again : it is hard to make way against history's unfocused projection for instance who have you invited for diner tonight? A month ago you wrote a name down on your shopping list so much happens between then and now you live with what doesn't care a fig for you floods and earthquakes for starters and there's always the fire you learned in childhood metaphysical flames it's not that you're separate from nature it's just that nature is all you have to live with now : at birth you saw it as the enemy now it's you and all those other mammals so much like you most of them worse off in your popular mechanics commercial for the earth new birth is not an odds-on favorite here you cohabit with the jay a continuum of accident and necessity now the jays have flown to another tree the noises you make little drummer are all noises that have been heard before time for a new tune that can't be played on the old drums but don't expect folks to give up their loyalties their comfort level when they hear your latest noise it is of course the same old tune only distorted reserved : tell me tom or tad or two-penny-tush does anyone understand you enough to say you're selling a scam a fraud although you call it the secret of life?

A P A R T F R O M I T

“...No, it is impossible to convey the life-sensation
of any given epoch of one’s existence...”

Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness*

The angel of memory is forgetful,
does not keep score, but plays the game
as if all existence is at stake,
as if every waking is the first
to break the freeze-frame
moments, all frozen smiles
and tintype mimicry, fading
come daylight, so quickly gone.

Keeper of fiction as the pure event,
an angelic imperfection of a perfect game,
the aeroplane in the box of Cracker Jack.

Never the closer for the saying of it,
locked into freedom, a universe of one
arrested, imprisoned in time past.

Hillcrest, stucco, French doors and garage, fireless cooker; an entry into the new century, certain to be the most glorious. The Yanks will make the difference. Wheat will win the War. Patriotism has a patent on prosperity, just wait and see. The Yanks will encamp in Washington, the Bonus Army, but that’s getting ahead of the story, times were good before the fall. From the sleeping porch in the new house, new everything, a child heard a scream. “Go to sleep. It was only a rabbit, probably an owl got it.” Ever after, he was poised for flight. “Too delicate for his own good.” Such was the verdict of the doctor, the neighborhood, his school; his parents were perplexed -- “Nothing seems to be going right, the job, the house, the child” -- a premonition easily fulfilled in 1929. The loudest voice, the auctioneer’s. Home became a matter of month to month rent, a pursuit of anything that paid. The family disappeared under that weight. On the road in broke America. The rumor of jobs was mileage on the road. South to Hamilton. North to St. Joe. East to

Connecticut. South to Ohio again. Southeast to Asheville. Far west to Albuquerque, all the way to LA. Tuberculosis took over a mother's life. Travel toward a never defined western dream became a daily hope, along with prayer and healing rituals, alien foods and sputum cups. Life held for another seven on-the-run years ending in LA and a mother's final hemorrhage. Not prayer nor any belief in country or in god survived that fugitive year.

Face it. There is no getting away from it.
The back roads are packed with waiting sensors.
A spider in my cap panicked and ran.

A church doorway suggested a way out.
Inside, the eye of God reflected candles.
And a mother dead from TB.

An event "not lived through" and therefore
Not found in life. Don't tell me that again!
A slippery metaphysic -- the eye of God --

In the narrow daylight of a needle's eye
Reflected intimations never met.
Unreal and sexual at the core of it.

A spider in my hair panicked and ran
But it was only memory
And nightmares past.

There were other lives to be imitated, perhaps to be lived. Ancestry vanished like a glacier into the sea. There was nothing that was not new or stolen. There were shoes to be tested, paths to be walked. Fainting from hunger, possessed of a larger hunger for the years to come.

Who pauses to remember?

A further estrangement
in the midst of chance.

Evening swallows in saw-tooth flying
warn us of night's advance by crying.

They leave although they crowd the sky
no cut or imprint where they fly.

Upon the air each flick of wing
is an accomplished fragile thing,

But grace and art too soon give way
to the exhaustion of the day.

Light gone, the swallows end their flight,
abandoned, we must face the night.

North by northeast into the permafrost, the climate change of age. We are as rhizomes tangled and holding fast, then let go, never let go, moved beyond to other latitudes and temperatures of place until, deep into the fiction of a “taking place,” a darker fiction of identity takes hold, ever directed toward the end of it.

Old Man, breathe-in your daily ration of
sweet air before the wobbly column tumbles:
nine decades, stacked and placed off center,
your building blocks, before the metaphor
collapses to chit-chat evidence of life;
your legs will not support this pilgrimage
admit that this is now and recognize
that this is real as it will ever get.

And then what? The sum of “that which is the case”
becomes a salvaged fiction of the real,
a distillations of belief, held
hard in the indifferent embrace
of chance and circumstance, harder still
in life’s divine, obliterating love.