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I cannot see me

Introduction

Cailean Jack

Bolt here, screw there,
the six million dollar man knew nothing
they do it will machines you do
nowadays programme in the smoke and mirrors
clever technicians with their cigarillos and padded seats
what a treat
money for nothing and your chumps for free
idiot consumer nation
the luxury of prestige buting
twenty six bucks for bottled water
and it tastes of entitlements
drops of privelege
running down every tanned neckline in the country

Matthew Duggan

The Imprisonment of Pan

Naked on the moor
skin sheared near to the bone
number jotted in thick blue ink
this wasteland is my abode.

Horns hacked from my skull
I watched the shell like shadow fall,
like a God's fingertip scrawling the mountain
for the misplaced reaping of souls.
Rebooting my psyche
strands of dissent removed from memory
my hooves were relined for these paths
stripped of any thoughts towards enmity,

the stomach neatly stitched
my snout drips of phlegm and lithium,
I'm barcoded
microchipped
obeying the signs that have entrapped me,

No longer will I take the lead
I follow
when I'm told to follow!

The Rocket Man Of Nordhausen

Star of David is burning
it's points melted like peeling husks,

shield of six tips in lily white and ocean blue
now a coating in reddened dust.
Tight wire hung the curious mind
human cutlets fed the blooded hound
a man whose face you'd never see,
in the Nordhausen underground.

Crates of swinging silver discs
poured into the ponds of drowning flesh
in Dora – the skybound cylinders formed
through the laboured dermis of starving entrails,

Don't slip on the human bark that spreads
like the soil from ash of charcoal bones,
You came in through these iron gates
and you'll leave through the chimney.

His banality of evil could be easily misplaced

shedding his Vellum for another flag,
a figurehead for the upcoming space race.

The Silent City

Taste the rancid stench of the city
Poison dripping down my tubes
Rampaging through my ribcage
Innards a spiralling compass
Like ink blots thrown from a damp page.

Locked inside tin hounds
Petrol clusters weave pockets of air,
We breathe in the swirling oxygen
That balances us in muted horror!
This daylight persists touching my skin
Like glass faces left out in the sun.

I only feel alive when this city sleeps
So I can wander inside her dreams
Be that lone figure strolling the split of daylight
Hear no sound in the city's bloodstream
The rushing of sirens and mild chatter;
Contented with just the feel of the midnight breeze until
We begin once again!

Wonderland

In wonderland
scratch card and tenement block
deserted bunker
dirty needles
where headless statues
are painted
in rotten fish-heads and discarded butter.

Concrete square of boarded up
shop entrances
vomit smeared carpet of stone,
swaggering monkey men stroll the dankness
studded dogs on silver chains.
Bloodshed queue of kebab and taxi
where teeth decorate
yellow-lines,
spray tanned blondes
stumble bow-legged
singing songs into midnights neon moon.

The Sunbathing Fox
I saw him one afternoon
Orange carcass
Bathing in sun pools of grass
Dozing in my back garden;
slight whistle of cars pass
Rolling in the daisy covers
Far from the chase
Those death tones
From the nearing bloodthirsty bugles!

Eric Hoffman

Hawks wheel in spiral flight heavenward,

Each circle becoming less to the eye

As the bird vanishes into the vault of sky –

That grand observatory of barnyards,

Field mice & moles, so with the pelican crane

& sea-fowl tribes, greedy eaters,

Disgusting gluttons all, yet how finely into nature

They integrate a clean & pleasing whole.

Ask wrens & crows & bluebirds –

Returning to shells

The size & color of the moon

As to a dinner plate,

& so the world renews its race

For a thousand summers –

To know nature

Is to grasp a kind of permanence –

Clouds & grass, antiquities

Older than pyramids –

Goethe's plant-genuine creation –

To see a cistus or a brentus

Is to sigh with ignorance

Beyond mere classification.

The Vast Eternity opens before you,

A rich abyss, mute & void,

Demanding something god-like

In him that casts off common yokes & motives –

High be his heart,

Be it a world, or simply purpose.

Animals have been called

'The dream of nature'

& in our dreams

We conceive their consciousness,

We assent to the Monstrous,

We glimpse calamity.

The rare women

Take possession of society –

To them the whole earth

Is a garden to cultivate,

Given form, given tone –

If they sit as we sit to wait

For what must be said

We shall have no Olympus –

Their genius is elegance.

While men stammer and mince.

They speak simply as song.

John Grochalski

the unluckiest man on the face of the earth

i've never bet one cent on sports
never played a slot machine
or rolled dice in vegas
i don't like poker or gin
i wrote poems at the dog races
and drunkenly threatened to call the ASPCA
many editors have called me bukowski light
but the horse races can have themselves
when someone says, i'll bet you
i usually balk, even if i know i'm right
my wife wants to bet me all of the time
but we share a bank account
so it makes no goddamned sense
i was in atlantic city once years ago
but i spent the weekend crushing ritalin pills
putting the powder up my nose
and getting drunk on vodka and beer
when i wasn't in the strip clubs
there was a documentary on donald trump
that played continuously
i'm willing to bet no one watched it more than once but me
i tend to eat the same foods
and get drunk on the same shit night after night
i don't even take any chances on people
i haven't made a new friend in years
and the ones i have
i could lay some money down
on what their reactions would be
but whenever the people in my office
collect money for the lottery
i usually chip in a buck
not for the thrill of chance
but out of fear that they'll win one day
when i don't play
and that the next morning
i'll wake up with the realization
that they're all millionaires now
free of the stigma of having to work a job
and that i'll have to go into work alone
die there in my seat until i'm sixty-five
end up on the front cover of the new york post
with a big headline in bold letters calling me
the unluckiest man on the face of the earth.

love's travel stop (sunday afternoon)

it's already ninety degrees out
not even one in the afternoon
i curse the climate while taking a piss
in the men's room at love's travel stop
somewhere in pennsylvania
where every billboard on the turnpike is telling me
energy taxes are killing the working man
and that the bible is absolute, true and final
there's a country music song playing
something about springsteen songs and lemonade stands
men on the moon and fireflies in june
the singer tells me that we don't always get it right
but there's nowhere he'd rather live than america
i'm glad that i don't know the song
but there are a lot of men whistling to it
as they piss and wash their hands
back in the travel store people are in lines
paying for gas and buying cigarettes and snuff
i grab two bottles of unregulated water
owned by pepsi or coke
found in springs from out in drought-torn california
the country song is still playing
about high school proms and open arms on country farms
everyone in the love's travel stop is white
except for one black dude
he's wearing a blue chip in his ear
he's got a big backpack on and is sweating profusely
he keeps asking everyone coming in and going out
how hot they think it is outside
i tell him it's ninety
he says, it can't be, it just can't be
and starts pacing around the store cursing
i think maybe i should start getting worried about this
with the way things are going in america
but then it hits me that black people don't usually kill in bulk
the way us white people do
so i smile at the cashier who calls me honey
pay for my gas and the water
start singing the country song
in the same disney voice as the singer on the radio
go outside and drop fifteen fracking dollars into the tank
along with every other picture postcard yankee
blessed to be living here in one nation under god

**on briefly studying pope francis'
encyclical on climate change**

my wife says
they usually put men
who talk to god in institutions

but i'm not sold on this pope
despite the tenor of his insanity

although he has nothing to prove to me
a non-believer riding the dying waves
of this american christian tide

i just don't want to see pope francis in the nuthouse
or even in jail, especially not an american one

who knows what kind of atrocities could happen

i mean whether he'd be pounding patties
for mcdonald's or wendy's while in there
working american airlines or, god forbid, victoria's secret

i like that alienated catholics are jazzed about this pope
people need things to be jazzed about other than television shows

i like that he gets by on doing the bare minimum
of just preaching peace and love

unlike the last two barbarians
who stuck their noses into everything
and let their priests butt-fuck little boys

some critics say that this pope practices
latin american catholicism

i don't really know what that means
except maybe something along the lines
of an american proxy government
with a bloated dictator at the center of it

but that doesn't sound like pope francis at all

maybe they mean he'll just be a good shortstop

someone to snag all of the chip shit the world hits at him
turn it into amazing double plays

that is to say i tried reading some of the pope's
encyclical on climate change

but it was written in italian, i think

or maybe it was written in
one of those latin american languages

mexican or ecuadorian or venezuelan
or whatever they speak down there

i know he got the point across here in my office
where we speak stone cold american

we haven't had air conditioning for weeks
and everyone is sweating and cursing
praying out to god for relief

but god works in mysterious ways

so i'm sure our suffering
is benefiting someone somewhere else

and helping to save the climate too.

newborn

in the paper route days
i had this one house
i always tried to collect from to no avail
they'd just had a baby
there were notes on the door
about not knocking, not ringing the bell
they hadn't paid me in months for the morning paper
and because of those people
the thirteen year-old in me
was missing out on baseball cards
cassette tapes, gum and soda
magazines that had pictures teen starlets
that i was starting to fantasize about when alone
on saturday deliveries
when i didn't have to be up before the sun
sometimes i'd catch the husband outside
drinking coffee
he'd take his paper
but would never say a word about what he owed me
you added three or four more homes like that
and some weeks it was like i was doing the job for free
after a few more weeks i decided
that i finally had enough of the newborn
i ignored the signs and warnings
and began pounding on the door one afternoon
my mind caught up in slices of pizza
french fries at mcdonald's
about the money that i was owed for my troubles
and even though i expected it
i was pulled out of my revelry
by a baby's wail and by shouting and cursing
the father opening the door
with his face red and his eyes about to explode
pointing like a silent film star at his notes
but i just held up my collection pad
and waited for him to fish out
the twenty bucks he owed me
fingering the green
as he slammed the door
moving down the block not giving a damn
because i was starting to learn
how america really worked.

happy hour

sitting here
in froth's tavern
trying to carve out
some semblance of a night

the last seat available in the joint
by a tv blaring college football
watching sweat collect
on my \$5 jack on the rocks

playing mathematician against my will

calculating all of those mistakes
and the things that never should've been

how one of the bills
that came in the mail was for \$50

how that one didn't bother me
as much as the one that came for \$700

along with a note from the company
casually mentioning their friends
the collection agency

yes just sitting here
waiting for my wife to walk in

the both of us tired
from the tail-end of another
thankless six-day work week

waiting for her to smile
and ask me how i am

waiting patiently
for her to take off her coat
and order a drink

so that i can talk a fiscal filibuster
and ruin her night too

before she even has
that first glorious sip.

Gary Beck

Uncaring

Streets of my city

decomposing

as fast as prosperity

leaves the middle class,

deserting

those seeking admission

to security,

effortlessly denied

to so many.

I did not know

how poverty consumed

so many,

with our leader's collaboration,

or they would find a way

to halt the slide

to dissolution.

Afterlife

When death comes

it is not kindly,

subtracting us

reluctantly

from pleasure.

We will no longer see

sunsets, flowers.

We will no longer hear

birdsong, gentle breezes.

No matter what religions claim,

or those who saw the white light,

there may be nothingness,

but if there is something

it will be a surprise,

good or bad.

Blip

Madness rules the land
but we are so blinded
by material comforts,
brain-washing tv,
we do not see
insanity in charge
of our shredding destiny.

Unequal Conditions III

Rich and poor alike
enjoy sports,
the rich from luxury boxes,
the poor from the bleachers,
the rich more contained
with ample resources
to accept defeat,
the poor more emotional
identifying with their teams,
the similarities,
mutual dislike of losing,
lack of appreciation
for best efforts exerted,
rich and poor alike
only enjoy winners.

Travel Agent

Migrations once meant survival
and the tribes grew bigger
to insure arrival,
until the founding of cities
interrupted transit,
conflict continuous
between residents
and transients.

Darren C. Demaree

NUDE MALE WITH ECHO #97

I like to haul in
the purpose of love,
all of those sounds
that confirm
unabashedly the pattern
of the way
& the big wood
building, the construction
of you will never be
lonely again
& even if this time
it doesn't work out
you can always make
a nest in the warmth
as it disappears
slowly, like a forest
in our able town.

NUDE MALE WITH ECHO #98

The loop
& gawking
never brings extinction;
it's always the blunt blades
reaching too deeply,
making a mess of things
that starts talk like that.
It will never happen,
but those bastards always run
their tools inside of us
figuring out how to bury
the brewing
of human spirit.
Nobody can figure that out
& that wiggle
births all manner
of religiosity, extra
meaning for crackers.

NUDE MALE WITH ECHO #99

I was cast.

That is how

I explain

all things.

I claim to be

both art

& mouth(er)

of art. I am

lost, which

means I am

can be found

anywhere

between you

and me.

That is why

I have not

searched myself

until now.

Steve Slavin

Little things can mean a lot

Did you know that Americans work longer hours and have less vacation time than the citizens of virtually every other economically advanced country? If you don't believe me, you can look it up.

After graduating from Brooklyn College, I was resigned to having to work from 9 to 5 for the rest of my life. And for most of the next 5 years I held a series of pretty crappy jobs that kept me stuck in an office all day. A couple of nights a week I went to NYU, where I studied economics.

One very cold winter day I was sitting on a bench in Central Park eating my lunch. There was snow on the ground and very few people around. I had a bunch of walnuts with me that I would have for dessert.

Did you know that you can crack a walnut by placing two of them between the heels of your hands and then pressing them together? I had cracked the first nut and had begun to eat it when a squirrel approached me. You know how, when squirrels beg for food, they kind of stand up on their hind legs, place a paw across their chest, and give you this kind of pleading look?

I had really been looking forward to eating those walnuts, but I'm a complete sucker when a poor squirrel begs for food. It was such a cold day and that squirrel probably had had nothing to eat. So I put one of the nuts on the ground. The squirrel picked it up and rushed off with it.

Just as I got ready to crack another nut, the squirrel was back again. Well, you can pretty much figure out that by the time I was ready to go back to the office, that squirrel had cleaned me out.

All afternoon I thought about how every winter, those poor squirrels living in the park had to get by on handouts. But then, I began to realize that those squirrels had a better deal than *I* did. Sure, I could buy all the nuts I needed, but *those* guys got to stay in the park all day. *They* did not have to go back to the office after lunch.

I had a friend who was extraordinarily lazy and extremely smart. Nadine managed to live quite well, but had no visible means of support – not that I’m criticizing. When I told her about my encounter with the squirrel, and how I wished that *I* could hang out in the park all day, she grew very thoughtful. Then she looked me straight in the eye and announced: “Steve, you should get a job teaching in a college.”

“Are you *nuts*?” I exclaimed, completely unaware of my pun.

When Nadine finished laughing, she said, “Look, it makes perfect sense. College professors work about half the hours that a normal person works.”

“*Really*? I remember all those compositions we had to write in freshman English. Poor Professor Park must have been up till 2 in the morning marking them.”

“Steve, you know that only English profs get stuck marking compositions. None of the other profs has that kind of workload.”

“Just look at the big expert! You dropped out of Brooklyn College four times during our freshman year.”

“True, but I also got *readmitted* four times. Which, incidentally, the Registrar informed me, was a new school record.”

“OK, what about making up exams? And marking them? *That* takes up a lot of time.”

“Puuuuullleeeeeeeeezzz!” she replied, heaping maximum scorn upon me. “They’ve been teaching the same courses for so many years, they could make up exams in their sleep. Or use old exams.”

“What about *marking* exams?”

“How long does it take to mark a multiple-choice exam?”

Fine. I would now play my trump card. “Who would *hire* me? I just have a master’s degree. And at the rate I’m going, I won’t have my PhD for years.”

“There are 65 colleges in the New York area. [I wondered where she was getting her facts.] If you apply to all of them, I’ll bet at least *one* college would hire you. Look – what do you have to lose?”

I knew that Nadine was completely right. And sure enough, that fall I was teaching economics at New York Institute of Technology. Coincidentally, it was located just a couple of blocks from Central Park.

They had me teaching 5 sections of the intro economics course 3 times a week. I had a 15-hour week! It was, by far, the easiest job I had ever had, and was certainly a lot better than sitting in an office all day, trying to look busy. And as things turned out, I actually *liked* teaching.

After my first day, I knew I could never go back again to a *real* job. My life had changed. And all because of my encounter with a squirrel – *and* some great vocational counseling from Nadine.

Soon the leaves were turning and it was getting colder. It was the middle of the busy season for the squirrels, who were gathering food for the winter. Often I took long walks in Central Park, and I always carried plenty of walnuts.

Robert Martin

Devil Riders

As the storm approaches from the north
Devil riders atop race to get into position
Their angry black heads pile up in the skies
Once a peaceful pastel against a baby blue
Now a thick black swirling mass taking over
With devils screaming at the top of their lungs
Bombarding the earth with heavy artillery
Reaching into their well stocked arsenals
Cursing and throwing everything down at us

Hell rises up from its habitat down below
Heaven is sent downward to take its place
The apocalypse it seems to be ahead of time
As devil riders get their wish to ride in glory
They race across the skies and shout
Victory comrades! The earth is ours at last!

But Mother Nature, as transitory as she is
Waits until all hell gets tired to rescue us
She's our heroine, our blessed lady from above
She is as beautiful as the color of heaven
As she smiles against the pale blue sky again
Hell had its fling, but now it is over

Now as the sunset begins to
Move upon us
And devil riders atone
For their transgressions
They shed their armour and
Dress up in vestal robes
As they ride miles across
The deep crimson skies
Chanting postludes to wrap up the
Daily devotional rites

Oh beauty, thou art my home

Oh beauty, for thee I roam

A Fool's Paradise

Into her den and through her door
Where fools swim far away from shore
A sweet alluring haven hidden in the mist
Though dangerous waters of heaven kissed

Her perfume sailed with the ocean breeze
Into fountains of life such as flowers to the bees
My body awoke unto the call of the wild
And took me out to sea to a distant isle

Danger is a serpent dressed in charming red
That coils around my waist and takes me to bed
Her thighs are white hills beneath a silken cloud
A rhapsody of soft interludes whispering aloud

I'm the foolish one wandering away from home
A vagabond with no name, stripped to the bone
A sign on the shore washed away with the tide
Nowhere to be found with no one to guide

So love takes me in with its arms around my waist
With its offering to me a new sensation to taste
With laughing voices mixed with sweet honey

And me as a fool that wonders what's so funny

And now with my strength in the palm of her hand

I'm a piece of driftwood washed up upon the sand

I'm in fool's paradise living the life of a fool

Going back to that place, going back to love's school

The Talking Tympani

“My head hurts when you
Beat me up so much
With your constant pounding

The next time you use me,
Find a softer ballad so I
Won't hurt so bad

Or may I sit the next one out
When the orchestra plays
Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture?

Please leave me alone
For a while

By the way,
Do you have any
Alka-Seltzer?”

Ajise Vincent

HALO

The ambience of your antecedent
smells like the urine of a god
whose kidney has been extolled
by cults of propagandas .

It stinks like the corpse of a fly
that embraced the idiocies of deceit
at the herald of dainties. Covetousness.

I see you deterge with antiseptics,
antiperspirants, colognes,
under showers of redemption.

But is that necessary?
When you are plagued with avid- bromhidrosis :
The disease that fraternizes with odours
that pervades from the conscience of the greedy.

TOM,DICK AND HARRY

With goodies, glamorous
as Sheba's rubies
he makes you feel regal.

Immures you wholly,
in the mesh of substance
with the institution of forever-after

in his speech;
"you are the verb of comeliness;
the definition of true character"

Like a priest— hallowed,
he worships the glory
that bestrides with your beauty.

Ay!be careful,
scrutinize the ifs of his thoughts,
deeds, psychology

Lest you hear thuds
accompanied by screams
of pleasure

Sahara Blues V

He who listens to my song
Listens not to mellifluous symphonies
That fill the heart with ecstasy
He listens to the pangs of refugees in Borno
Whose dreams are eulogized daily by bombs

He who listens to my song
Listens not to praises to anonymous oracles
Who eat barren goats and even members of their worshippers
He listens to the cries of albinos in Tanzania
Whose futures are cut short by fetish ignoramuses

He who listens to my song
Listens not to notes of the nightingale
That blesses dawn with rapturous rhythms
He listens to dirges being sung to Liberians
As they flare hopes that died of bat disease

He who listens to my song
Listens not to festive ballads
That give an illusion that all is well
He listens to the last wish of that lad in Somalia
Who just died of gastric ulcer

He who listens to my song
Listens not to word plays
By men who speak through their nose
He listens to the cogitations of a restless youth
Seeking answers in a world of deceit.

Post Scriptum

Cailean Jack

I cannot see me

disappears off screen again
perhaps better adventure somewhere else
another coin lost down the side of the vending machine
another photo smudged by the photocopier
one more lost sock, split coffee, unwanted gerkin
goodbye, goodbye, goodbye
you'll see me tomorrow
on the other side of the street
waving with the other hand

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COMMENTS & SUBMISSIONS

Submission and comments should be sent to Klaus Gerken, Chief Editor at kgerken@synapse.net. Note that we do not accept simultaneous submissions.