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Introduction

Michael Ceraolo

June 2, 2015

traveling around the watershed:

People

1

"he don't look so good
I think he's coming down with ammonia"

2

The sign on the bus said
"Take only one seat"
and
"keep aisles clear"
but
a sizable minority of riders
ignored those directions
with impunity

3

She got off the bus,
walked two steps away,
then
turned and scurried back on,
able to re-board because
the bus was still waiting
for the light to change
She mentioned the number
of a connecting bus route
and the driver asked her
which way she was going
on the connecting bus
She didn't answer directly,
but
did say she knew how to get there

Michael Ceraolo

Machines

1

An automated voice called out each bus stop,
with
interesting if incorrect pronunciations
of some street names
and
a complete inability to recognize HTS
as the abbreviation for Heights

2

The car was old enough
to have license plates
identifying it as vintage,
but
it didn't have them,
nor
had it been treated as such:
it had sat in a corner
of the parking lot all winter,
surrounded
by piles of plowed snow,
and
the light green of the rest of the car
was nothing but rust on the roof

Weather

1

The temperature was normal,
maybe even slightly below average,
yet
some complained of being hot:
they were wearing dark clothes
(not uniforms of any kind)
that absorbed the sunlight

2

We haven't had snow in June
in my lifetime,
but today
there is a blizzard of a different snow:
the fruit of the Eastern Cottonwood tree,
heavy enough to leave measurable accumulation
in some places

Neighbors (People and Otherwise)

1

A neighbor waters his lawn even though
we've had adequate rainfall this spring
The water evaporates in the heat,
forming the most common greenhouse gas
that will make such watering necessary

2

A neighbor spread chemical fertilizers on the lawn,
spilling some of it on the sidewalk,
the only warning such a thing was done

3

A doe and her fawn
are in the neighbor's yard
Fortunately,
 it's not the one
with the chemicals on the lawn

Donal Mahoney

Bugs and People

No season of the year is best
for being homeless though
autumn warns the worst is near

and those who sleep in doorways
want to learn their options as to where
it might be best to spend the winter while

those who spend summer in the garden
sneak under doors and over transoms.
Folks step on bugs indoors and bring

their winter needs for shelter to an end.
This time of year before the holidays,
folks with roofs are toasty while

homeless bugs and people aren't
although it's true that fewer bugs
have to live outside all winter.

Old Quilter, Old Poet

She's been making quilts
for half a century and he's been
making poems that long as well
and every now and then he brings
a chocolate shake to her place
so they can take a break and talk.

He always finds her at the frame,
peering through thick lenses.
"I'm still house bound, Walt,"
she laughs and likes to say.

Once she told him quilts are poems.
She works with scraps of cloth
and he with scraps of words and quilts
and poems are never done until all
the scraps are where they have to be.

Now she's working on a Double Wedding Ring,
a quilt not unlike a sonnet in that both follow
patterns of their own but she likes crazy quilts
because she can improvise with scraps
she finds on floors around the house.
Her job's to make something beautiful
from scraps others might throw away.

He has no problem understanding that.
He saves scraps of words and marries them
in ways some folk find odd or useless.
Finishing her shake she says maybe
they play jazz and just don't know it.

She likes Miles Davis and puts his album on
when a crazy quilt won't go her way
but she would never listen to Miles while
she's at work on a Double Wedding Ring.
Yo-Yo Ma, she says, is the man for that.
The old poet says he would never disagree.

Marimba in the Afternoon

Raul is a kind man
who plays marimba
in a salsa band at LA clubs
late into the night.

Some afternoons he plays
at a nursing home in Cucamonga
where he was born, grew up
and dashed home from school.

He's paid with a taco,
maybe an enchilada,
a burrito now and then.
On Sunday a fresh tamale

almost as good as his mother
used to make after being in
the fields all day, long ago.
Old-timers in the day room

bounce in their chairs, some
on wheels, to Raul's music.
Long ago they were young
and danced all night in

tiny clubs after being paid
a few dollars a basket for
picking grapes and plums
under pounding sun.

They Were Refugees, Too

They were refugees, too,
back in the Forties,
settled in Chicago,
learned English,
some a lot, some a little,
found jobs of some kind,
made do like their neighbors
until things got better.

And by the Seventies,
on hot summer nights
they were loud and happy
gathering on Morse Avenue
around parking meters
in the dying sunlight
outside one of the delis
lining the street
to argue about the Cubs
or politics or anything
they could disagree upon.
If someone made a point
someone else made
a counterpoint.

Arguments squared off
with cab driver against lawyer,
handyman against accountant,
all of them equal as a people.
They were survivors of the holocaust,
some with forearm tattoos
shouting under short sleeve shirts,
others with tattoos silent under
long sleeves worn to the office
that day with a tie.

Chicago had welcomed them
thirty years earlier and now
they were giving back, working
and sending their children
to college after making a life
and a neighborhood their own.

White Butterflies and Gram

Gram tells Stella on the phone
her neighborhood is full of old folks.
She hasn't seen Stella in 60 years
and won't see her again because
of the canyon of miles between them.

But Gram insists on keeping Stella
current on her neighbors who die
when the seasons change, although
Stella's never met one of them.

Gram tells her Tom Murphy's wife died
around this time last year when the
Monarch butterflies took off for Mexico.
And Mary Kelly's husband died the day
Gram saw her first robin of the spring.
It was a bad year, Gram tells Stella,

pointing out Father Flynn passed away
at the start of winter when the juncos
came to bicker with the mourning doves
on the floor of Gram's porch, fighting over
seed spilled by cardinals from the feeder.

The cardinals and jays stay all winter,
Gram tells Stella, and look beautiful
in the blue spruce surrounded by snow.
Too bad you live so far away, she says.
You'd like it here when autumn comes.

Now the only visitors are white butterflies,
Gram says, the little ones most folks ignore
in summer when Monarchs rule the garden.
Monarchs look as if Tiffany designed them
but they're more beautiful than any lamp.

Gram doesn't know if the white butterflies go
to Mexico the way the Monarchs do but says
they don't look strong enough to make the trip.
Then she wishes Stella the best of health,
says she hopes they'll chat again next year
and begins a litany of long good-byes.

Simon Perchik

*

This fish is still gathering the smoke
left over from when the sea went back
to face some crackling beach grass

—side by side you too are warmed
by salt and standing naked
you can see a woman is striking a match

though when you are dead
the glaze on this dinner plate
will afterward heat your eyes

—they will never close, this fish
is looking for tears to fit in its mouth
tell you eat! bite into its eyes

though nothing will cool or be at home
where you keep the ashes warm
by collecting the bones and sand.

*

You feed these birds at night
the way every feather they use
comes from a quarry where the air

darkens with each landing —it's Tuesday
and you still have not forgotten
their return for seeds, endlessly

weeping for a missing child
a brother, mother though their eyes
are unsure how to close

when listening for a name, a flower
a river —you fill your hand from a bag
as if at the bottom they could hear

an emptiness that is not a night
falling behind step by step on the ground
—how open it was, already grass.

*

And stubborn yet these wicks
warm the light they need
to blossom as stone

then cling, smell from hair
burning inside, clawing for roots
heated by butterflies

and the afternoons coming together
to the light the fire, be a noon
where there was none before

*

You stir this soup as if each finger
is warmed by the breeze
though your eyes close when salt is added

—small stones could bring it to life
overflow with branches, berries, wings
shimmering and far away dissolve

into a sea that has no word
for sitting at a table, naked
waiting for you to turn on the light

wrap your arms around a bowl
that's empty, a night no longer sure
it's the rim you're holding on to

that's circling a man eating alone
who can't see, hears only the waves
becoming lips, colder and colder.

*

This thin sheet has no strength left
spread out as a bed
no longer interested in love

though the edge still folds in
taking hold a frayed promise
pulling it to safety word by word

–look around, what was saved is paper
shrinking into curls and hollows
has a face, a mouth –all in writing

has the silence, the forever
death listens for –what it hears
is the unfolding face up

the way moonlight
has never forgotten your fingers
are constantly unpacking paper

as the frail sound oars make
when bringing back a sea
that was not cared for :this note

all this time forgotten, in a box
half wood, half smoke
as if it once lit up the world.

Milton Ehrlich

HOW LONG CAN IT LAST?

How many times can you
brush your teeth, make a bed,
rub toes and noses together,
toast a bagel and brew a cup
of Constant Comment tea
before you get whacked
in an uncertain world.

The heart, a lonely pump,
with no guarantee.
Rivulets of blood
clogged with debris,
ennui becomes
an everyday friend,
lifelong pals fade away.

Prosperity here today
and gone tomorrow.
Unexpected illness
and accidents lurk
around the corner.

Dreaming and scheming
to survive. Whipsawing change,
from one day to the next,
the only thing you can count on.

Breathe deeply, one breath at a time.

MEMORY OF AN UNFINISHED POEM

In the middle of the night,
we hear a muted
trumpet rendition
of the haunting melody
from La Strada.

My old lady drops
her flannel nightgown,
emerges like a butterfly
from it's cocoon,
and dances madly
like a flying Twyla Tharp.

Her body has the finesse
of a Stradivarius violin.
The dance sets free
dust motes from Tankas
on our bedroom walls
that become a cloud of fireflies
with green-eyed patinas of love.

They whirl to the rhythm
of the film's wistful tune
as moonlight glints off the head
of our laughing gold Buddha.

After she collapses
in an exhausted heap,
we hear the voice
of Fellini, demanding
one more take.

A HERO PACKS HEAT

Increasingly forgetful,
my friend can't remember
who he is or where he is
as he gets lost in heroic reveries.

He's convinced he has a gun,
but it's just his extended
forefinger and upright thumb.

Whenever he passes a bank,
he practices pointing his gun
at a smiling guard at the door
who thinks he's just saying, "Hi!"

A Korean War veteran,
he thinks he held back
the Chinese at the Yalu River,
allowing his company to retreat
while he manned a Browning
.50 caliber machine gun,
like the hero in his favorite movie:
"Guadalcanal Diary."

When it grows dark
on late afternoons,
he points his gun
at his head.

UNCIRCUMCIZE ME PLEASE

Return my foreskin coat of armor.
It keeps the barbarians at bay

I can't get the stench of black smoke
of crematoriums out of my nostrils.

An uncircumcized penis, my best defense
against the next time enemies of Jews
come looking for me.

Ever since Jews were driven out
of Judea six thousand years ago,
they've been nothing but trouble
in a world that loves to hate Jews.

If we're so smart, with so few of us,
earning 129 Nobels, compared to Muslims,
earning 2 Nobels, how come we can't learn how
to stop being persecuted by everyone?

When Jews returned to their homeland in '48,
they found their troubles were not over.

Now they're overcome by the stink of gunpowder
blowing towards them by Islamic fundamentalists,
who never learned what it is to be human.

Jews continue to hunger for the light of sanity.

DAY OF INFAMY

Early one Sunday morning
we cuddled in dad's bed,
waiting for him to wake up.
We listened to his rasping breath
before tickling him awake
at an agreed upon time.

His breathing was rattled and deep,
reminding us of a whale with a
clogged blow-hole.

We couldn't wait to get to the City
to see a show at the Paramount or Roxy,
and lunch at the Automat, on baked beans,
steaming hot chocolate and lemon meringue pie.

Minutes dragged on. Bored, squirming around,
we did hand puppets shadows on the wall

When dad finally got up to shave,
we turned on the Philco in the living room.
Moments later, running to him asking
breathlessly, *What's a day in infamy?*

With war declared, we were too young
and dad too old to serve, but, he volunteered
to be an air-raid warden.

Years later, when dad told us he had cancer,
like a vine frowning wild inside me,
his emaciated body looked like a homeless
hound, all skin and bones, a shadowy version
of his former self.

At the hospital, we sat by his side,
listening once again to his breathing,
wondering which breath will be his last.

Tamas Panitz

from, *Uncreated Mirror*

1.

Light seen from the heart.
Shapely familiar,
heart watching mind

she broke the mirror on me,
sparks traipsing through lives
that wise material

enough words for us to see
this is what I had to tell you
whatever starts to say.

2.

Non verbis, sed rebus, Roses of Sharon
held over a running stream.
Wash the facts off, those sins

it's even easier than killing
to silence; cover the quiet insistence of things.
The walls scarred deep with leprosy.

3.

Tree rushes through tree
the moment in its precision, you can see it
look, through the silky edges of your apple.

4.

Led me here, another alphabet
camping on the lawn, waiting, certain
as a handful of almonds

concerto for some other sunset, all you need to know is here
the many books of what one couldn't say
fresh eyed gnomes ambling through the startled cabbages.

5.

I was plucked from the water
those first five numbers we learned in wisest Africa
counted me and never let me go

marketplace busy with doves
fabrics dyed with urine
subtle lingering metals

reach into the crowded morning
great and terrible as Abraham
sun like a scales balanced succeed

this rickety cart to be greater than the sun
forget who's speaking in the bustle of things
run off with the whole sky with your hands.

6.

Come home and remember
numbers don't tell you what's next
an underworld anxious to advise you.

7.

Ambient light of pale leaves
leaves rattle Evensong in wood-speak
loss of distance in blue

as it gets toward dark
everyone's four feet tall
and the hills sing their sweet songs to me

entre chien et loup they call it
because the stores close and Villon comes out
because the surface, that old masonic secret

when you touch there's only depth, nesting under context
frail elves holding our silly human tools
banter in the phony alphabet

the words doubted me and did their own thinking
secrets the whole obliging woods memorized
a word at least on every leaf.

8.

All the religion you need, a couple lazy words
at midnight written in your mother's journal
more reliable than the sun

that silence in heaven
thirty minutes you can always hear
anxious Canadians throwing beer cans on the field

cut open the silence, open the light,
scratch deep in what remains
some reliable bible, *biblion*

any scrap of papyrus confetti half trodden into the street
because there is no other book
that's all we know, another nobody from nowhere

your whole ontology lightning-flash
when you unbuttoned your shirt to cold rain
I trusted that thought for not thinking, easy inhabitants

angels standing in the middle of the road
the people of stories, of memory,
I watched you from across the sea

listened so hard you saw, I had to be very small
a character of necessity, wave like a cabby whipping my horse
all that you've forgotten seashell pristine in your hand.

9.

I like you. First things speak,
first step her telos
stepping beyond the dance

to where I held my knife above the clouds.
Every poem is a love poem
threatening you with its dagger. Threatening to love

the comfortable world away again. So put the horse
on the roof. Hold your hand and let it pray. Save what you have
because there's more than everything to give. Terribly more.

10.

Neighbor drying her sheets always unclean by the weekend
I tug the cloth off its pins over my head
my unseen arm is long drapes wide over the country,

you walked out warm, smelling of leaves
synapses soldered onto the zoetic country
look out your glasses and let the trees think for you.

Joseph Farley

The Sludge Swimmers of Shenzhen

The beach was small,
the sand was dark
And made of large granules.
I watched the bathers
And thought to join them,
But Li Xing stopped me,
Pointed to the open pipe
Dumping raw sewage
Into the ocean
A hundred yards away
From where families
Laughed and played.

among the shadows

there are people
who tell you
they exist,
but you know
they are just
shadows
on the wall.
they move
and they talk,
but they have
no true form.
you listen
and you watch,
but they soon
fade away
as soon as
the lights are
turned down.

sitting alone
in the dark,
you might
reach out
for a hand,
that may,
or may not,
be there,
but you
reach for it
anyway.
what you grab
may just be sheets.
what you have lost
may be even less.

the price of fame

there was a time
before cameras
were everywhere
and our lives
were films
studied by
the police
and FBI
and managers
and masters
all watching
and looking
and reading
our lips
if not listening in
directly
on all that was said.

how quiet
and personal
were those
eons
before
everyone
was a celebrity
and government
and bosses
and store owners
all turned paparazzi

tell me
in a whisper,
draw a figure
with your finger
in the palm
of my hand,
let us pretend
for a moment
we can live
and communicate
alone.

Everyone loves a good story

I love to hear the sound
of your sweet lies,
so pleasing to the ear,
but I can see the other side
in your big brown eyes.

What should I think of you?
Should I think of you at all?
Or just remember where the door is
as I am heading down the hall?

The Pool Table in the Park

In Shenzhen you pay the fee
For a small paper ticket
That lets you walk in the park;
Stroll manicured paths
Between groomed bushes and trees;
See the fish pond stocked
With large red and white carp;
Stumble upon a pool table
In the middle of a lawn
Where the local sharks hang,
Studying the crowd
And polishing their game,
Waiting for some country sucker
To come along and take up
Their cold eyed challenge.

night blooms

the moon is dripping
on the flowers.
white petals
that should be closed
wink and yawn
in the cold light.
tomorrow
they will need
to sleep late
and not see the sun
until noon.

Found and Lost

The penny you find
Is the penny you lost.
The heart you break
Becomes your own.

The earth splits
And spews out fire,
Lifting one shelf of rock
And lowering another.

These quakes and eruptions
Keep the system going.
Plates move slowly,
But watch out when they do.

People wear adult masks
Hiding the faces of children.
Under muscles and makeup,
They still play in the sandbox,

Throwing things they shouldn't,
Hurting would be friends,
Running in the wrong direction
When it is time to go.

All that comes and goes
Came and went before.
All the songs we sing
Are just so much sound.

We rattle the bars of our cribs,
Wanting out and wanting more
Love and pleasure to fill us,
Forgetting how easy it was to give

Before the ground shifted
And we grew tall
While becoming
So very small.

Hustled

God and the devil are conspiring
in a dark alley behind a tavern.

We are the dumb marks
set up for the fall.

They talk in whispers,
occasionally laughing
and pointing in our direction.

They are plotting out our lives,
all the twists and turns,
the good and the bad,
the annoying and confounding,
the colorful and the bland.

They roll the dice and place bets
on every possible outcome,
knowing no matter how absurd
a human existence may become,
we will continue to play along,
because, even if it is just a game,
it is the only game in town.

john sweet

not the end of everything, but still

crows on a roof worrying bones
in the early-afternoon rain

just this

just silence shot through with
the hum of powerlines

a meaningless sound
like the voice of god

a question of so much
flesh & blood gone missing

hangman

you inside the sacred circle and
yr lover outside the door with
a bullet in his head

no small amount of magic

a mirror facing its darker twin and
then an infinite number of walls
inside the prison of your mind

a dream of your father and
of his father before him

an unbroken line of suicides

all those sad grey songs of
infinite joy that
no one ever sings anymore

the forest's edge and what we found there

your job is to map the
city of masks, but where to begin?

snow covers everything
and the stench of corpses

a war?

always and everywhere
 yes
but this feels different

a plague maybe
or a loss of hope

the age of internet porn and
no way to escape it

a victim is a victim
no matter how many lies you tell
and the only way to be a
politician is to be a whore

the only way to fuck the
weak and the starving is to do it
until they bleed and then
 do it again

why do you keep
begging for the truth if it's
never what you want to hear?

gut-punch sweetheart blues

they fucked up out on the highway
too many dead and then the
witnesses had to be killed too the
cover stories amended all flags re-sewn
in brighter shades of hatred and glory
but we ate like kings for a month

we spread the lie
that the war had been won

built our palaces that much
closer to the sun

Don Mager

May Journal: Sunday, May 5, 2013

Crinkling, drying thin and heading to
their land of the forgotten, blooming
Wisterias scattered through the trees
watch their better days sift away. They
are neither yesterday nor never.
In crass contempt of them, morning breaks
into now's arpeggiated fife,
piccolo and flute trills. The wide yard,
Cypresses on one side, Apples the
other, hosts quadraphonic Robin
choirs. Their responses and calls sing out
hello and sunrise. Full of song, the
lofts have no time yet for the ant and
worm breakfast spread across lawn's buffet.

May Journal: Tuesday, May 7, 2013

The mower trudges through tall rain engorged weeds and grass. It skids on early morning's slopes like grease spilled floors. The blades gag on the thick wet concoction. Savory hay spews barn loft furrows out. Well-worked shoes soak green stains up into squishy socks and blistering toes. Merciless, the steaming engine grinds and trudges on. Helplessness sprawls before its path. Three-foot tall pink and blue Irises lie broken in the lawn. The mower gulps them down. Bright confetti shreds cough out and stick to damp sweatpants legs. All morning, morning is a stopped stop watch.

August Journal: Thursday, August 22, 2013

Shadows from the streetlights whisper cool
kisses along the nape. They lick at
ear lobes. They tickle leg hairs. In the
ditch beside the road, grass is dark, wet
and shaggy. It calls to the stooping
silhouette: *Kneel low. Reach. Feel around.*
In the dark, wrapped in its plastic sheath,
the morning paper waits. Midges flit
around the groping wrists. They search in
vain. Knees decide instead to sip at
the mud. Like halos of cool breaths, damp
snuggles though the shirt. It stumbles to
stand. With glasses wiped, predawn fog walks
hand in empty hand back to the porch.

October Journal: Sunday, October 13, 2013

Two small Downy Woodpeckers bobble
up the up-stretched arms of the pecan
tree and tail first bobble back down.
Late afternoon overflows the back
yard. Their dapple stripes and wings are black
like gleaming coal. And like fresh snow, their
white head stripes and chests glow. Their dapples
dart and bob, while squirrels and Mourning
Doves pursue methodical patient
searches through the dry grass and fallen
leaves, and in a flash they fly away.
Senseless to pied and downy beauty,
the long arms of the pecan flutters
their drowsy song in the late-day warmth

October Journal: Thursday, October 24, 2013

Pre-dawn driveway crunch strolls down to the street where early cars, like oars swishing through dim shallow currents, swish through the night fall of leaves. Solitary in the crisp air, the stroll stalls in the center of the road looking both uphill ways. Each hill is splashed with pools of streetlight light. Each a full circle. Each flecked with glints. From the horizon, a low drone wakes the consciousness of ears. Ahead of it, while stillness fondles chills down and up the watcher's bare arms and legs, a sunlit arrow slides silver through the seamless dark sky. The chill strolls back.

Post Scriptum

john sweet

dog

let all the
little deaths add up

build walls
without
windows or doors

you are one sorry
motherfucker
 but
what other choices
do you have?

creepy-crawl blind
down the interstate
feeling the good
heat of the sun
bake into you

bleed from the hands
 from the knees
 from the darker
corners of your heart

nothing matters
 when
everything counts

baby looks so
 pretty
digging tiny graves

understands that
every needle is filled
with the pure white
light of christ



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