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SAINTE-TERRE, or The White Stone.

In 1602, a ship full of English adventurers and would-be colonists dropped anchor off the west end of the island. Seven miles across an ocean sound they spied haughty chalk cliffs that reminded them of Dover. But here the harbor was snug. They came ashore and spent the winter. Next spring they went back to England and for one reason or another did not come again. (So it was not till several years later with the better-known but more mysteriously fated settlement at Jimson that the English tried again on the continent.) The leader of the expedition to our island, Mr. Bartholomew Gosnold, was an actor and adventurer, a colleague of Mr. Shakespeare, to whom in the spring of 1603 he imparted news of the island, its wealth, its shimmering illusions, its magic.

Grotto of you.

No cross no star. Emblem else.

Something older than a stone. Other.

When they built this abbey they had another god in mind.

Ruined abbey. Sky intact

Less law, more necessity. How many years
already we have given to each other,

presence, presence, us unwrapping us to find.

Bones of this body.

Now the bluish lilac
of a cold spring stands in the doorway,
shadows immigrant, a broken
window. Ogive.

In your hands gently touched together in the habit of prayer
there's enough light left
to see through your loose fingers
our ancient masonry.

How we are made.

No roof to us, open to the sky.

Do you know what the sky *is*?

Eyes in your hand,
see through. Touch the sky.
Rules of craft.

We touch
lightly, a ship
sailing down the cloud.

Wind fustigates the saint above the door, wears
her smooth hip rough. What saint
is that? She is the Magdalene
who loves us too.

Ivy

grew up round our ankles as we stood,
we grew to be part of what we witnessed.

The Middle Ages never ended.

Only renaissance at all is us,
all this philosophy these new abscissas and mantissas
these fossils, Darwins, Freuds and quarks
just phases in Very Late Romanesque.
We breathe inside the imagery, we live
by images
and while we do
the Renaissance will never come,

we still live inside
broken cathedrals,
still hope for heaven
we call it having

O be my Jew again and get beyond the actual
into the real, abandon images
because the image always
is an idol, the actual
is idolatry.

Only desire gets beyond the image
into the dark of possession, being taken,
locked inside the moment of

and it is dark. Electric light began the reign of Antichrist.

It is why we are most ourselves in ruins
jagged walls piercing the sky

to break the light
at last

and set us free
into the dark understanding,

no roof on us, no stars
but what we choose,

volutes of desire burst in nova flame.
And all around us stone is laughing.

ALBESTONE, or *The White Stone*: 1

And watching.

It waits near,

a smooth white stone

no one found

or it is in my hand
weighs, unknown,

waits. A stone
knows how to.

Having and knowing
so far apart,

even the hand.
Shadows of shadows.

ALBESTONE, 2

The size of the thing intended
waits for The Blue Virgin to sail
out and bring me lemons back
from where the lemons grow

and sherbet from the mountains
while I recite her names,
titles, properties, her size
in megabytes and summers,

she has elm tree shadows
on her back I try to brush off
and then we're gone
from each other. The lemon

is a stone. It is so far
from here to Mecca,
no distance back.
Once a thing happens

it stays happened
forever, close as your skin,
part of you, the part
that keeps you from the world.

3.

If a boat went out the way a woman does—
the Imam paused.

Which boat, which
woman? They're not all the same.
If a boat, if a woman, I don't know,
things sail through each other, or across.
I wasn't listening, I was seeing.



Why do we do what we do?

Why is pleasure?



Some say aluminum sulfate
makes them blue.

Others talk big about copper.

Alchemists are such a breathless lot
everything is such a federal case –
the only secret is a city.

Soft roulette, the chance...

But the Imam's pause went on.

4.

Suspiciously, in checked trousers,
offering baksheesh the way we do
(rent, tax, invoice, fee)
to keep a rolling world beneath our feet,
he offered me a smooth white stone.

You are not the first to offer me
evidence of arcane survivals
symbols of what is always true
and that we always hated.
I threw the stone away, far
as you'd toss a green
tennis ball to please a retriever.

It lay there in the grass
still gleaming,
waiting for its dog.

Why is pleasure?

There is an afternoon when time comes true –
after is the only time.

Morning lies and night forgets
so wait for the lengthening tune,
time of the shadow growing.

Then listen hard, it's hot and mean then,
it's the way things are.

The cars.



Where is the stone now when we need it?
Where does the farrier go when the horse is dead?
The great staircase in the Rhinecliff Station
rises to a door kept locked.
The whole stone building
is like Gordon Craig's set for Hamlet
and we are ghosts on the battlements,
the door always locked, no way
into heaven, no way off the earth.

And the train seldom comes.
We haunt the river and the hill.
We harrow hell.

For when Christ died
(in Vienna you see him on his way
uphill among the multitudes
tiny figure different only by the cross
he bears among so many,
Breughel shows it the way it is,
every act is lost,
every face a mask, every mask
lost in the crowd)
we all died too.
We all are eastering always.
This white stone
(I retrieved it at last, ashamed,
washed it, set it on my table
to hold down pages never written,
my history of the time to come,
my careful description of the end of the world)
this is the stone the angels rolled away.

No angels. He rolled it away himself
to see what the outside was like,
that famous place death's supposed

to be the gateway to. The interview.

That little girls are supposed
to lead you to? carrying palms?
he asked. Be aware
they lose their shape when they get older
he said. But everything has a shape,
no matter what it is, its shape
given to us to please us and declare.
That's a childish objection,
like a painting by Monet.

5.

But maybe when you die
you're born inside the stone.
That would be hell, wouldn't it,
all that compression, breathless weight,
moveless, hard?

But it might be white,
translucent, a lovely sea fog
that never loses



and an island in it.

That is you.

You are apart from everything.

You know nothing.

Or the tender things you even know you doubt.

FROM THE DIARY OF PARACELSUS

Waxed over sea the sun
is a bee – the light is wax
someone eats the honey

I need a pseudonym
to say what's on my mind

the sun is God's monocle

the poet said, slipping
on a wet plum stone
in market dawn

forty years before I was born
the sun was also shining
amazing things
knew how to be
before me and to do

one thing leads to another
that is the great rule the E at Delphi ε
the vav at Jericho to die n
and not let it matter to be born
in no one's way the light decides

you have heard pure agency stirring in the ground
have kissed such things as rose
and bent to them that didn't flower

in those days holding a leaf
meant business silo full of wheat

nobody asking questions where did you
get that rain who hung the stag horn
sumac with such raw meat

why is the moon?

ALBESTONE, 3

But if I settled there
and watched it through the year

like Gosnold's men
on the island shore

all my mornings till
now it's near the window top

and who dares to look at it

In sea fog the white stone

Foam

On the table a white stone

Round makes
sea and stone
the same.
Shape gives light.

On TV I watched the naked sadhus
all greased and color coded, ashy
naked men grinning at the camera
like any other naked men
permanently drunk on some fool god
as I am, drunk
on gravity and light and all the pale
omegas of the distant world,
in love with the end of time.

I prayed to time
and time touched me..
Now I am grey from his caress.
They warned me –
don't be older than you are
as I sat trying to be sophisticated
in the Captain's Table on Sixth Avenue
drinking my Tom Collins
making eyes at a steely lesbian
across the aisle, they warned me

Stay in your own time, stick
to your own kind.

But I have no kind, I said, no kin,
I am alone, alive,
the rule with no exceptions,

a sky without a single star,
pure dark, the ice cube
in your glass too, I'll bob
against your lips whoever you are
but I will have no kinship,
no system with the earth, just earth
itself if she will have me.

And you reached out and closed
my lips with your rough fingertip.

ALBESTONE, 4

The one I never heard
is talking to me now

“our prayers are a ringing in God’s ear,
he sees what happens to us
--our wars and pestilences, our

all too natural catastrophes—
the way a man at morning remembers his dreams
vaguely troubling images
here and there and nothing clear.
He set us loose in the Unclear.
The uncanny is the closest
to him we can come, the hum
in our ears his answer,
sea fog soaking a traveler's hair.”

Chance favors the prepared

.

Do we love enough
to touch the stone?

A tumble of flowers
the lilacs still holding on,
June lilacs!

and the new roses
especially the white ones
near Morgan's other house
the richest smelling rose I ever
and irises a few steps uphill
and all the seaside roses coming out,
the wild ones, and beach peas, sea poppies.

Can this information save us?

And from what?

Walk back through Bruno, della Porta,
Paracelsus, to the original scholarship
that understood the *motus floris*,
the movements of the flowers
as they walk through time,

smell by smell, a percept at a time.
They are the ones who tell us time is space,
just another space
deep encrypted, seeing
sees it only now and then
and we say The so-called rose
is blooming or An osprey sailed
above our house this morning
clutching motionless a silvery fish.

Then some day find us
in time's place
perpendicular to
this island now

and we are gone from here.
Time is the other place to go.

The voyage of the sea, the secret.

(– Eric Elshtain, by Gnoetry)

Because the sea has its journey too, it too is moving.

The way global warming is a glacier road

And bee-eaters in their orange feathers

Pour north from Africa to meet the north

The sea is moving forward, dragging

The earth along with it through space

Until we drown or it dries – no other choices,

Madeleine. But she doesn't for a minute

Believe my gloom. Just stop believing—

Now touch my cool hands and understand.

Poetry, archipelago, island.

A part of any art is always waiting. Poets were waiting for years for Foucault, press agent of their radical disconnections. Poetry is half rupture, half rapture. Poetry is all about discontinuity, dematerializing the given 'unities.'

Archipelago, not mainland. Hölderlin's Archipelago beginning to show the way. Or we now beginning to say the nature of this thing we so instinctively, drivenly, do.

Poetry transfers the sense of unity from the imputed object to the experience itself – like Buddhism, poetry is experiential, not propositional. It enunciates, it doesn't prove. That is perhaps why the wrongest poets (Milton, Dante, Pound) can also be (or might even be expected to be) so great. Burdened with preposterous or horrific orthodoxies, they take flight, take refuge in pure saying. The word flees from their meanings, perhaps from its own meaning, into the intensity of sheer, mere, presence.

(Subtle Milton inside overt Milton, the apology inside the apology at the start of Book I of PL. God's works need 'justification' – and the astonishing bravura that such a theological immensity can be accomplished by a poem. What must a poem be, to have such force?)

This transfer of the powerful *experience of enunciation* to the apparent object apparently addressed by the implicit or declared subject is the chief strategy, and chief crime, of poetry.

By making the [reading of the] poem discontinuous from the intention, game-plan, mind-set of any speaking subject (e.g., an author) the power of the experience is restored – and it, itself, the experience, can be examined, to solicit or enjoy the pleasures of *criticism* – a word to whose ancient meaning of judgment, discernment, we have added the more radical connotation of observation.

ALBESTONE, 5

Everything catches up with the white stone.

The stone catches up with nothing.

Not even itself.

It left itself behind long ago.

There is a table

where the stone rests.

A white stone is the well beyond dreaming.

How fast the sea comes in today

skimming towards the shore.

When water stops moving it becomes a stone.

Maybe this one was the Sea of Galilee,

maybe some fine morning I can take

a boat ride into the stone

and listen to the lake,

hear Jesus talking, and Simeon bar Jochai talking

or not talking.

Timeline. Battles of the Great War.

Passchendaele. Chemin des Dames,
a quarter million killed to move a hundred yards.

The lines. The names stay,
My Lai, Nagasaki, after
a few hundred yards nobody remembers.

Death's diverse livery
worn in all the alphabets of time
name me. I was there too,

noplace, some days
I can almost remember. In Normandy
in '54 a tree by a truck stop

some men who looked at me
across the table soccer game
as if they'd seen me long before

the way a hand knows the handle of a door.

When will my childhood end?

THE FISH ON THE STEEPLE

What is the fish for,
what is the fish for me.

A morning to think about Freud
and the striped bass on the steeple of the church

a fish not a cross,
the Christ not the crucified

instead the Christ always wet with his own oil
the deep-sea answer

arising, he walks on the waves, walks
up out of the sea.

Christ is Cthulhu. It was *Catholics*
Lovecraft was so afraid of,

because Catholics let the old stuff show through,
the old gods of Guinea and long gone,

and it was Catholics coming, they beached
on Narragansett shores

and breached his Deist calm
with crazy Christ, a suffer god, love god, death god, come again god,

Christ of the mad Azoreans those Africans
magic Christ of blood-crazed Portuguese

that howling church off Wickenden
in Fox Point, the Fish on two legs

coming up from the sea,
coming for me since the catacombs,

why do you think they really drew a Fish
on the wall, don't believe that acronym for Jesus stuff,

they drew a fish because He was a Fish
and you know it in your bones

when you look up at this white church
and see the weathervane Jesus fish on top

pointing usually to the southwest
as if Africa wasn't bad enough they get

their wind from the Antilles from Indian America
where in every hillock of corn they planted a fish,

the fish on two legs comes for me,
gypsy Christ mestizo Christ

and where did a Jew get those sea-green eyes?

All the heavyweight early American Puritans – and many of their Deist successors, stray guilt-ridden novelists – were fleeing not from sin but from Christ. Christ affrighted them because Christ was miracle, magic, power, Christ was sly. So they fled back to the nuance-less Old Testament, the patriarchal Grand Guignol from which Christ tried to distract us, lead us from the harsh desert of the father into the city of brothers and sisters.

Charlotte asked me, What was the Harrowing of Hell? I think the answer, what it means that between Crucifixion and Resurrection he went down into Hell and broke down the gates of the place, and let out the righteous of all times, is that Christ let justice and truth escape from the Old Testament into the new air, he rescued holiness from horror. Christ rescued the individual from the tribe, the heart from the brazen altars.

And when Hell Gate fell, there may have escaped from it not only the ancient virtuous but the good people of all times – maybe the gate of hell is really time, and Christ broke time.

Not nailed to the geometric cross with Roman iron nails, Christ is the supple fish, the living silvery presence in the sea of time. No geometry contains him; the tomb is empty. A fine wooden fish, carved by the late Steve Baldwin, quivers in the sea breeze on the steeple of Cuttyhunk church.

ALBESTONE, 6

So the *terre sainte* is that land where the white stone is found. Wherever the stone is, that is the holy land.

Sainte terre. To it we saunter. Saunter to Jerusalem. No other way to get there. Will-less, wander. Let it find you. *Saunter.*

The *disruptions* in the Grail legend narratives are the essentials. The Grail itself is about a radical discontinuity, one that is either built into the world (according to Gnostic speculation) or fallen into it through acts of will or defects of will (according to the drift of narrative invention).

It is when Malory says “Now takyth this tale leave of Sir Bors, and torneth to Sir Gawayne...” that we know we are in the zone of authentic telling.

Because the real story is always incomplete, ruptured, fragmentary, incapable and undesirous of resolution. As Stein said about writing, A story wants to go on.

The Grail itself – a vanished cup that held once the blood of a vanished man. In this double removal, this profound occultation, lies the real significance of the symbol – the magnet to which adventure is drawn. It must always be far away, a gap between it and the quester. The grail found is no grail at all – the heart's ease is in the seeking.

ALBESTONE, 7

What does this road say,
the pen found on it
called "Atlantis," pocket
clip bent back by nervous
youth, unbitten, unchewed,
abandoned near Saturday's dead frog
old duck pond full of pickerel weed
and who am I?

A veil over the instrument
burka on the phallus
that infidel,
 are words
 the same as germs
something you pick up in the street

bring home

ripen there

where else could they grow

in your actual body

veiled from all others

your dearest opaque skin

do words live in the body

then go out in the street

to touch each other and contaminate,

a word's what goes

from there to here

where you are

still safe in sleep.

But Atlantis must be part of it too,

mean something,

remember the rule: Everything happens to you.

You meet the famous actress

but she gives you a rose.

You sail to the Cannibal Isles

but it turns out to be

just a word in your ear, a sword

coming out of the sun,

pathway down the Nile,

up the aisle, aorta, apple tree
further and further,
it happens to you
away and away,

who lost this word?
the builders never listen
they build what they please
with my money
the temple rises this way and that
all round you, a condo here
a bungalow down there, a lumber yard
a cat drenched from heavy dew,
you have to tell me
who else would know
is it winter or summer inside the stone?

were you there when the ship went down
that was an island
seven smokestacks one by one went out
the hiss of heat
that drives my turbines
foundering, water cold by nature,
first of all things, a cat looking at the sea.

The birds are back
I grew there too

what do you make of the rash on my back
is it what happens when I listen
or when I turn away from too many,
and when am I a word anyway,

a breath after such a long struggle at last to be made out of wood.

Cuttyhunk Island, June 2005