

Moods of It

it was rich it was the moon it was strange
like a pearl being turned in some old Thelma's
hand it was breathing the deep sharp air
of risk it was the high note left hanging
by the trumpeter with white shoes in the lakeside bar
it was the lake skating away from the broken-down pier
it was morning it was what we offered
it was the slim glance you passed me
it was your legs round me gentle the trust
that trees have standing like questions
it was leafy it was something
we have no longer a name for

A selection of poems from *The Middleman* and *Falling Body*, by David Cavanagh
Some of which will be read on 4-15-10 over WRUV

Neil Armstrong Shoots the Moon

Neil Armstrong on his back deck
gazes up at the blatant moon
the way you might peer at a vacation photo
of Seattle propped on a cluttered
bookcase. Says, "I've been there." Or

Neil Armstrong shakes his bristled head,
"I've been THERE?" Same
as you, tossed in time, squint at all those
glossed Seattles floating
deep in inner space, far from your daily orbit.

Or even, like Neil, bathed in moondust,
feel the prick of small
skulking knowledge you've been there
but don't know the place
at all beyond a booted step on a crusty shell.

Or Neil says, "You know, I was only first
because I was sitting near
the door," and you recall a burbling phone
one tea-cozy morn,
all lunatic thereafter, a kettle whistling mad.

Or, if with a little launch of ego Neil says,
"I'VE been there," you wonder
what kind of "I" it was saw Seattle, and if
you still know that person
you know you badly need to know.

Or, less likely but to be hoped, Neil swivels
a craggy pate
up to the orange-yellow Buddha, feels
implausible rain or tears,
no telling which, kiss his runneled cheek.

Just as you, one ragged half-corked evening,
home in on the moonface
backlit in the bathroom mirror – so like
your father's, so much
stranger – gravely seeming to say,

“I've been watching
you for years. Time you noticed. Who
are you, really, what
is your intention, where have you been
to give off such a light?”

At the Mercy

For Pat

This tender July evening, my brother in hospital
with virulent strep from an insect bite
or yardwork scrape. Minding his own, then
hijacked -- jazzed-up, hooded bacteria
careen through his body, leave him like a gutted
school bus in Gaza. Or a charred
hillside in coastal California -- firestorm
in the system, raging up leg into lymph
almost to the heart, ravaging as it goes, leaving
behind a bloated limb and fever
blazing in a counter-burn, both fires racing
for control of the vitals. Finally backed down
days later, antibiotic ten times the home dose
dripping into the vein. Me miles away
on my porch, chest pains again, the artery
wincing with worry, or sympathy, or disease,
or imagination, this attack out of the blue, fanatic
bio-terror, savage, single-minded, what
means, this limpid evening, the sinking sun
bathing the alder Caravaggio-bright, west wind
rising, invisible, long *sshhh* in the shaken leaves.

Quantum Jump

for Sean

The wave that crashes
on the rocks
is made of particles that behave
so much like waves
the scientists
scratch their individual
heads until
they're one bobbing mass
and their
voices rise like spray.

*

Certain uncertain certainly
we are all
going to die one
day probably
is about all with precision
we can say.
No one has ever
not done it,
and I don't aim to be
the first.
Not that I lack
ambition,
only that aiming
doesn't
seem to help.

*

Still, smack the tennis
ball against
the wall often enough,
it could
one time go straight through.

So I say unto
you, phone the woman,
plant the rare
hibiscus. Most likely it
won't take,
except when it does.

Long Ride in High Wind

You put your head down and push/pull.
You think perfect circles with your feet,
same pressure down, up, around. Again.
Again. You drop to the lowest position,
present as little of yourself as you can
keep presenting for the longest while
you can. You pedal with cry-baby thighs
mile after mile straight into it you burn.
You say out loud – and it's blown back
into you – this is stupid, really stupid,
and you pedal straight into the burn.

You're not trying to beat it. You can never
beat it. You look at the tall, bent-over
grass and you know you can never beat it.
You are making your way through.
You're admiring the force, invisible,
relentless against torso, and the will
that powers your lungs, zen masters
that take in, transform, make use, blow
back a bit of their own. Same will
that made your sweet, aged, dying cat
keep trying to get up when his back legs
could no longer do it. You wear a look
that some would call grimace. You have
no time to explain. You are happy.

Cycle

The way a wheel turns,
grounded
low, spinning free up top.
A life like that,
you might get somewhere.

Waitress I Never Knew

Harelipped you were beautiful,
 loon-lonely eyes and lithe
shape split by the veering, renegade
 lip. Asymmetrical, utterly

stirring. After the surgery I wasn't
 even sure it was you, so nearly
regular your mouth, just a hint
 of up-pull, so flashing

your look. You seemed younger, less
 sad, less sure, too, as if you
had become your own little sister.
 How I wanted that wildly rising

line still to be there. I had no right.
 I know your life is better now,
hear it in the loose swing of your chatter.
 But your glance -- more flit

than flash. Something has been smoothed
 away I loved. At least one self
wrenched from bed by thugs you never
 knew, hustled off, never seen

again. Now it is left to find out
 what was lost in that line
you were born with, what became
 of the disappeared, what grace

resides in that thin river you
 no longer have to cross,
and where it may be found again,
 and why I worry so.

Montreal Blues

I come from disappointed people.
Mowers of late autumn lawns,

pushed-mowed and cross-cut into squares,
the cut grass caught in a canvas hook-on

emptied over and over into battered trash cans.
I come from ironers of underwear,

a people who stretched wool socks by the dozen
on wooden frames hung from basement pipes,

a father who spent forty-two years
hating a job to feed us, which he did;

his first job tearing used carbons all night
1934 long to reinsert into blank order pads

for use by busy sellers all the bright next day;
his last job filling blank order pads 1976

with thousand-dollar sales and taking crap
because he couldn't learn French in a city

full of chic he could no longer understand,
though he was proud of this Montroyal,

showed visitors its sights and history
like a parent holding out photos of a child

who somehow has outgrown and now ignores him.

- David Cavanagh

It's So Much Like Missiles

One day you hear they've been fired —
the missiles I mean — you imagine them
curving like so many Golden Gates
between a hundred cities, serene vapour trails
with some message you cannot imagine,
and don't have to, for you know
you have one half of one hour.

And everything's suddenly simple,
like the time you heard your father had died,
long-distance the phone clicking
softly as a heart while you felt everything
free/e in your tiny kitchen, altered,
and impossibly unchanged.

And the funny thing is not that they've gone
up — the missiles I mean — but that they remind
you of something you didn't do, some words
you didn't say, just didn't take the trouble
to say, like the time you were leaving town,
and a friend, and you never told her how much
she meant to you, and you never saw her again.

Now missiles are flying, and it's just
like when your father died, and the visit
you'd put off became a dream-train you lived
on nightly, dark train pounding on smoothest
rails of guilt, never ever arriving.

The thing about what's unsaid is
you can never take it back.
If you had made that final visit
you'd have fought with him, most probably,
over Trudeau, or disarmament, something
not too close. And it would have been
furious and futile till it hit you
that this time he was dying,
and you'd have stopped, and so would he,
both of you sheepish, feeling
each other sheepish, awkwardness
your last strange sharing.

But the thing about not visiting, not

loving enough to say or fight or apologize
or see something new between you –
the thing about not saying is

it's so much like those missiles
up there, on the way, on the final way,
so undone, so unsaid, and so impossible
to take back.

Meta-Morning

Every morning the *moi*
staggers out of dream.
Within minutes
it clamors for the stage.
Bathroom spotlights, mirror
monitor, the mewling
song begins: I, I, I.

Just try to stay out of it.
Shave.
The day may have something
to say.

~

The shy air
of pre-dawn
surprises your
neck as you
step off the stoop.
The long lovely
travail of walking
when you think
you know the end
of all walking. Try
not to make it mean.

~

Stuck in the car behind
the yellow Bluebird
school bus, I'm STOP-
signed and red-flashed
at every farmhouse.
Human nestlings
trail down the driveway
up into the box. Shadows
move in the aisle, then
settle. Eggs
safe in their carton.

~

If you sit still long
enough, everything you
haven't thought of
begins to move
across a screen
you didn't know
was there.

A marigold
the size of a fist
glistens, drips
rivulets of rain
along the hand
that holds it. Now's
the chance to slow-dance
with essentials. Don't
breathe a word.