

'A COMPOUND MARCH'

John Peck

1

*Place of the lion in evening;
situation of good
in the shiver of its morning;
fact's healing salt; amber's
ardour; the march of unities;
the countermarches of tributaries;
forgiveness's silt; awe's ease;
harbour of the shrike's plunge; jetty
of welcome; port's rocking pause;
peace, a fire inwrapping;
resurgence, a fire gone out; a swung latch;
the city, a compound march; old paint's rolled seams;
the republic, a quilt of equilibrations;
home a tongue unthought of; the oil of action;
iron door on railed wheels rolling
to one side; a burden carried;
hay in moist darkness; wing feathers;
the first unvoicing and the last
unworking; an axial
encompassing; forgetting
as gate, enablement the path;
a thing given; a swift fragrance; a hand;
anything in its own flame; a release.*

2

Borrowed bore-word that reams on in, auguring -
speech, action, and thought its drill field
until speech, action, and thought give place
until strife gives place, *strife*
closed in the sod and flown in the current,
atomised in the surf of timespace that foams
all of it now, however jangling.
Until a sound stops I haven't heard it
and prior to performance I can't anticipate
the actual sound. William Steinberg - stone mountain -
stood leading, not his *gross Orchester*,
but a jazz ensemble, and the surprise
calmed anguish, a treasure had vanished
hard to obtain yet he timed the cure, all thanks
to chrome-dome jive-master for all his numbers
their stream beginningless over its silent bed:
a commonplace yet summary anguish

yet here heavenly living
its curious rest in a fellowship
shooting right on through the food fights, *Let 'er rip*
Herr Händel wanting violins
while the monarch hankered after percussion and brass.
Beginningless in addressing a cure to the endless.
Slide on, oily Thames, under loop-diving gulls.

3

Slosh on, Potomac, Rappahannock, James
kings and tribes mingling, blood from brother armies
a trace element.

 Mirrored in wiggly smears
from the bridge, headlights overwrite the undercurrent
of tenderness, my shiny hard cell among
amber beads lining out under moon rise, each bulge
with an animal and etheric body
tranced afloat in half-crouch
hands and feet parodying the Shaker
gestures in their line dances

 Beulah encased
in gleaming fragility under the floating bright cinder
Beulah encapsulated and thrown
rim shot scattershot
 tracers shot slowly and curving.

Tenderness for that trance movement

 for it enwombs
something incalculable even to itself
and labours with it repeatedly until climax.

The lonely only empire's vaunt
and warning to all the peoples
lofts over the effort
benedictus qui venit in nomine
over us sealed off from each other
and the question *How did I get here*
flickers up from the two-million-year-old
gut rhizome *You my vehicle my double.*

4

You have to see what they've done to me now! My neighbour
in her mid eighties scuttled
to her writing desk. *Look, they're even*
duplicating my handwriting! Out her window
the wide lake calmed a prickle of sails.
This exact copy of my own house, they built it
in France, on another lake with the same hills,

*everything. And they've been keeping me here,
but now this: this t e r r i f i e s me.*
Her jagged scrawl terminated
midway through a grocery list.
George Oppen, who suffered the same though not
in the same way, urged that one word
we needed to understand was us.
What we make of each other. And psyche,
she who shares him and her with me and you,
going to school, learning to parse the lists,
bending over her desk with wisps
of curl dangling or braids,
leaves the tablet and goes home.
Arranges for Mary B. to live in her *other house*.
Replicates the landscape, boats, handwriting.
Has us study the word *mine*.
Doubles the scene, unsettling it. For it intends this.

5

Borrowed bore-word is any of them I take
as a first term. But once inside its sound
I may double the sense of it
not with dictionary but through
hum and rumble. This is as old
as the Vedic *rishis* and fresh as surrender
to medicine past grasping
and manipulation. Intended
familiar meaning is the first house.
Aural body is the second, booming
through the first house and spreading
out over the yard and the lake and transecting
a boat's rippling jib as it stills and then tacks.
Though you make the sound, it leaves you
and migrates among all other bodies
and harbours among their wave-rove, their rocking at anchor
in readiness for departure,
a steady congress of non-ownership
buoying all the grabbing gestures,
percolating them, detaching them, transmitting
constantly, porously receiving.
Any word at all borrows from this store.
The Shaker conga lines scooped love from their hips,
the lower chakras, and shovelled it into the air
while around them, or among them, swayed the singers.

6

Us for the eskimau embraced walrus, whale,
pursuer moulting into his quarry.
Compassion for their kill: skilled, fierce compassion.
Their articulated harpoons ended
in a walrus-bone aileron glued to the shaft's butt,
some of them fluted as many as four times
to channel the air. I stared at one of these
retrieved by Alekseev from the dig at Ekven
on the Bering Strait. *Butterfly form*
reads the caption. *In Form eines Schmetterlings*.
What lay there was a stealth bomber,
hungry engine ports hugging its body,
stubby wings swept back into tubes.
The two patterns wrestled each other, bone
amber and grave-cruded
wrapped into and through the gleaming terrible.
They designed the thing that destroyed our house
before they could dream it. The house I must leave shoulders
up through the murderous gravel of a mutant
and devout species, every
doubling within it dislodging me
that much more. Though it could also snare me
if I let it. Could harpoon me. If I let it.

7

The Sophiolotry of the nineteenth-century Russian
thinkers, and Raskolnikov's Sophia,
and the Church's dogma of Mary's assumption, follow
the Shaker Mother Anne Lee's
embodiment of Christ as woman,
that coming a second time but not as a first thing.
They took in Lincoln's war orphans
and dressed right on *technë* and dressed plainly.
Furniture kits their downstream spinoff
in the era of total war: oil and wax
finish or lacquer over medium stain,
rock maple. But such are the lees
from their liquor. They wanted the uncut wine,
highs coming from self-conquest, peace
from hard labour, family from no marriage.
There is only one Son of God. And then Mother.
Not some duplicate on a reservation
but the further thing. And that thing here.
She came one year before Lexington
leaving four small graves in the English midlands.
While Robert Gould Shaw packed corpses from Antietam
with charcoal for trans-shipment
Elizabeth Johnson watched Ann Lee

come into the room singing and touch her arm
and felt the whole *mana* of the *tremendum* flow through her body.

8

Though *While* spans seventy years:
six thousand dissenting dancers when war came.
More than itself body recalls, waits for touch
that tells, if it comes.
The *we* who sang and moved in them were not *us*
in any transparent sense.
Not the hot guilts that upheaved them -
yet a thing that rises before song
from the cells and blooded centres, remembering
what no one invents. Forget the asexual
commune that mass-produced seeds
and sit where you are, and stand it. And stand in yourself.
There, see what moves and move with it.
Skopas of Thessaly hired Simonides
to chant a praise song at one of his banquets
and in his poem Simonides magnified not only big
Skopas but Kastor and Pollux, and so the host paid him
half his fee: *Get the rest from those twin gods!*
Then a messenger called him outside to meet
two men. No one there. He went on looking in the dark
when the great hall collapsed. Simonides, shaken
yet finding that he remembered everyone there
and where they had sat, was able
to identify the bodies.

9

The body remembers? Wasn't it the chanter?
Topoi, places at table, *topics* - the run of an argument -
thought, action, speech the node of the labyrinth,
are they not all tremor from the throat-heart,
the medial chakras? *Anne Lee entered the room singing...*
At the node of the labyrinth, a blur of crossings.
The Greek rhapsode drafted as Notary Public -
yet the pair he invoked, like the Germanic
twin gods of healing, and also
their sainted doubles Kosmas and Damian,
presided over Mary B.'s imprisonment
in a cloned dwelling as her memory decomposed,
to begin separating her from what
perishes. Another house for the body
prior to that shaky memo / hand on the arm
as she sits next to you, then the power / a tap

on the shoulder from the messenger /
- at the node
of Mary's impacted synapses, and out of the epileptoid
cantata in Mother and in Simonides' choice of the twins,
a harmony of doublings, the hand of two powers
to one end, either dragged as Mary was
or willingly singing the incalculable
touch of it. Priority goes to sound
if you like - touch is not jealous. The two. And the one.

10

In Meetinghouses the two singing battalions of the sexes
faced, filed between, turned, counter-turned, circled
coiling, forearms lifting and falling in time. Which were first
lifted by sufferings. Which have scribed
diagrams of the movements. *En masse*
our bodies moved or were startled away
was it from them? - still moving, or startling away.
For piano steel guitar and in our time
the commissions are for things hammered, plucked, zing-stroked,
hand and string as in the beginning. Thus the zap-cording
of a small round sifting floor in curved space with requisite
winds, metals, percussion, harvestable woods, voltages,
impacts from asteroids, padded sticks, rosined hair,
alkalis, pressed oozes, sunned scarps and vibrating
columns of air, leafing and stripped stems, and the good
gone all among them, for death is not to be conquered and
touch would run up and down all the routes there. Lease to me
agile memento of that hurry and the cry fleeing in it
for massed bodies bend only to what sounds from
the doubleness at play in hands, their salty whorls across
tensiles, sheet ivories, the arrayed natures, as the blind girl
bellowed *W A T E R* her hand in its pouring. Lease it to me.