

Kedging New Poems

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Kedging: New Poems

JOHN MATTHIAS



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Once Again: For Diana

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I

Post-Anecdotal

. . . cannot you stay until I eat my porridge?

—WILL KEMPE

Post-Anecdotal

I

And then what? Then I thought of
What I first remembered:
Underneath some porch with Gide.
Oh, not with Gide. But after years & years
I read that he remembered what he first
Remembered, and it was that.

II

Not this: Someone calling me,
Johnny, Johnny. I was angry, hid.
It was humid, summer, evening.
I hid there sweating in the bushes
As the dark came down. I could
Smell the DDT they'd sprayed
That afternoon—it hung there in
The air. But so did the mosquitoes
That it hadn't killed. *Johnny!*
Oh, I'd not go back at all. I'd
Slammed the door on everyone

Kedging

's all you're good for
someone said. Is what? Your good

and for it. Not to fear: O all your
goods so far. Your good 4.

Your goods 5 and 6. With a little tug
at warp. So by a hawser winde

your head about. Thirty nine
among the sands your steps or

riddle there. Who may have
sailed the Alde is old now, olde

and addled, angling still for some
good luck. So labor, lad: *when other*

*moiety of men, tugging hard at kedge
and hawser, drew us from*

the sand? Brisk and lively in the
dialect East Anglian. *Ain't so well*

*as I was yesterday, for I was then
quite kedge. Even though I pull and*

*pole and persevere I'm blown to
windward. Winding still. Warping so*

as not to weep, cadging as I can.

Hoosier Horologe

I

On the Early Manner of T.E. Hulme

who had no later manner. But also
Hadn't pork chops in his poems!
Pink pigs for Impressionists, but
No *ardoise* / *framboise* for Mr. Whom.
Hulme, sir. And no E.P. in that T.E.
Matter, manner. Natter natter.
Only a Brit at the lip
Of a trench, smoking a Bosphorus gasper.
Only a moon torching a cloud.

II

On the Later Manner of Geoffrey Hill

You wonder where | that line I wrote has gone?
Famous in its time was "Where the tight ocean
Heaves its load." Some drunken sailor stumbling
From a pub and barfing in the street, I thought.
But cut for good as some kind of penance.
Spondee, that. Berryman is somewhere in this mix.
And not just Manley Hópkins. Not just Milton either.
The sailor's name was Ocean, Legion, Seaman,
I forget. What load did he heave then, M & M?
The bloody weight of the whole | world!

Corvo, Pessoa, di Camillo, etc.

Kevin Thomas Patrick Medina y Carrizo di Camillo,
That's your name. Your names. We all need
Three or four; we all should be Pessoa, Baron Corvo,
If we could be. But they, like you, were Catholic & I fear
This naming's pagan. Polytheists worship
Different gods in different names. Álvaro de Campos
Wouldn't write Ricardo Reis' poems. Just ask
Fernando. I'd never call you Tom or Pat. Nor would
One address the Baron—Frederick William Serafino
Austin Lewis Mary Rolfe—as Lew or Bill. Those names
Just seem dormant, somehow yet to come. I'm sorry
That we have to talk so much about the meds we take, the
Drugs intended by the medics to dispatch a name or two.
Rolfe was clearly paranoid, Pessoa was perhaps a
Schizophrenic. A critic of my own stuff wrote the other
Day that “although every poet must love names, JM
Loves them to excess.” Kevin, I would name you
Pope if I were able, Hadrian the Eighth. I'd puff white
Smoke out of my ears and nose. Who else sends me,
Lapsed Presbyterian that I am, Happy Feast Day messages
(St. Matthias, 14 May), or, for years, prays for my lost
And disaffected daughter who could be in Indianapolis
Or, for all I know, in Venice like the Baron as a gondolier:
Her name the most beautiful of all. Anyway, I hope
That all the gods protect the powers and persuasions of
The names of the house of di Camillo. And that they feast
As one and several in the name of what they love.

Polystylistics

Simeon had style, but only did
One thing—admittedly impressive, if unvaried.
Juggler, too, had just a single act,
And tossed his balls *before the Lord*.

Serial and several, boys! When
Menelaus asks for Proteus, he
Knows the servant of Poseidon turns
More tricks than Helen, and is

Hard to hold. Plainsong stylized the
Prayers: Singing at the monkish
Hours of Prime, Sext, Nones, no one's
Goods are Godly. Seals only barked

One note to lost Achaeans. Steel as in
Stalin piercé Shostakovich
But not Schnittke: *Viz*, his lecture at
The Moscow Music Congress, 1971.

Even *In Memoriam* can waltz on broken
Legs back from Leningrad to
Old Vienna, even a quartet can play its
Ending first and leap from Renaissance

Orlando Lassus to the *Grosse Fuge*. Hail,
Prince! If you hold Simeon, he only fears
A fall; Proteus may sing a pillar made of
Fire or water, but he sings. Stand to harms!

Poseidon at Apocalypse opens seven styles.

Not Will Kempe

Only . . . that's no jest.

RALEGH

A fool brings the queen an asp;
Another leaves the king
When he's most needed—right
In the middle of the play.

I think a fool is in the doorway
Of my life, neither bringing
Anything just yet nor going off;
He's there, though, and watching.

It's so quiet I can hear him breathe.
We're not on stage, but I know
That I'm upstaged—and
It's so quiet I can hear him breathe.

Christopher Isherwood Stands on His Head

Half way to a double dactyl with that title.
I think he stood like that for ten or fifteen minutes,
Which is almost worthy of hexameters.
Why was he standing on his head?
(I was standing on my feet, and mightily
Perplexed—a student down from Stanford
In L.A., looking at another kind of life.)
He said he'd finished his new novel
Just that day and thought he ought to celebrate.
And then stood on his head. He told me
That he'd picnicked recently with
Aldous Huxley—meant to be there at
The party—and the aging Chaplin, when they
Found themselves on someone's private property
Accosted by police. They were told they'd have
To leave. Huxley said: Do just let us finish lunch;
This is Charlie Chaplin, back for a visit to America.
The cop damn well knew Chaplin when he saw him—
Little guy with a derby, cane & funny walk—
These three trespassers could
Pack it up and move it out, he said—and that
Included Charlie Chan . . .

And I thought

I knew Aldous Huxley when I saw him—
Approached a tall man in a corner sipping wine
Who said—*But I'm Jeff Chandler, actually!*
Astonished, I stared at Chief Cochise, noble Indian
Hero of my childhood, Jimmy Stewart's friend,
Star of *Broken Arrow* which I'd seen a dozen times.
I could feel myself perspiring, and I
Couldn't think of anything to say. *Aldous Huxley is quite
Old, he sniffed. So is Charlie Chaplin, who is over there.
He's talking with Marlene Dietrich, Chandler said—*
Isherwood still standing on his head.

Smultronstället

. . . and someone saying, *Yes*
but Göran doesn't really speak good Swedish.
I looked up, perplexed.
Skanian, he declared. *He's from the south,*
as all of us—Doctor Isak Borg and Marianne,
Sarah, Anders, and Viktor;
Susan, John and G. Printz-Påhlson—
headed down to Malmö and to Lund.
Smultron's not the same as jordgubbe said
a man in dark glasses sitting right behind us in
the Lane Arts Cinema, Columbus, 1959:
a handleless clock, a coffin falling from the hearse,
and top-hatted ancients walking to their
jubeldoktor honors, Borg having dreamed
his way from Stockholm, Sarah both his lost love
and late Fifties girl, just like my Susan, flirting
with the guys in the back seat, chewing on her pipe.
What did I know then of time, of memory, of age?
And who would watch a movie wearing heavy shades?
We looked behind us and he nodded in a formal way.
Göran, ten years my senior, was writing poems
in Malmö that von Sydow liked to read—*Max*,
as he called him, who spoke his Swedish very well
whether as a knight in *The Seventh Seal*
or there before us pumping gas in *Smultronstället*
or when reading Göran's poems to a little
group of connoisseurs. But Max doesn't
get it when the doctor says, mostly to himself,
Perhaps I should have stayed.
We didn't get it either, though we stayed—right
through the film, and trying very hard.
In twenty years I'd introduce my friend from Skania
to my Midwest as Dr. Printz-Påhlson, poet.
A colleague thought that Göran was a royal and

called him *Prince*. Oh, and Göran hated Bergman films, all that religious angst, which everybody asked about, even though his lecture was on Strindberg. So much for the 80s. In 1959 Bibi Anderson was twenty-two, only three years older than my girl friend. I thought how much I'd like to sleep with her. The man in sun glasses put his head between us and said, *Place of wild strawberries; the English doesn't get it*. The car drove on. Years after Göran got his own degree at Lund, his head literally belaudered, little girls in white throwing flower petals in his path, he fell all humpty-dumpty down a flight of stairs and broke his crown on the cement, and lost his sight, and pushed aside his work, and rests in silence in a Malmö nursing home. With whom share a joke, a plate of herrings, bog myrtle schnapps? The nightmare examiner had said:
You are guilty of guilt
when Isak Borg mis-diagnosed his patient, saying *She is dead. You are incompetent*, concluded the examiner, and all of us got back into the car And headed south: Borg & Marianne; Sarah, Anders, Victor; Susan, John, & Göran; and the man in heavy shades. The summer sun is blinding, even in the night. *Smultronstället*. Wherever we were from, we couldn't stay.

Oscar

Not the movies, poems—
And before the days of Dons Allen and Hall.
Oscar Williams: pocket paper books
Of modern verse. (Also Little Treasuries.
Also Mentors and—revised—the Palgrave.)
Held now in contempt or just forgotten, *Pocket
Modern* was the Bible of my teenage faith.
“More than 500 Great Modern Poems”
Bulged in my pocket like a wallet stuffed with cash.
There was the Genesis:
Emily, Walt; there was the Exodus: poets still
In their prime.

Those summers I worked
For minimum wage
At the State Auditor’s office, Columbus,
I loved best what I least understood.
My blood pulsed pizzicati
When I smuggled lines of Wallace Stevens
In reports I typed. Entirely by the numbers,
Ohio’s new electric Royal
Hopped to dollars & sense in the tables
I prepared—tabs
Jolting me over the page: tens and
Twenties and thirties of things; hundreds
And thousands and millions. If money was a kind
Of poetry, was poetry a kind of money too?
\$2, 384, 958. 00—*A violent order is disorder; plus*
\$3, 179, 265. 00—*A great disorder is an order.*
These two things are one.
No superior collecting my reports
Seemed to notice a thing, so I kept it up
All summer long. Stevens’ Oscars
Bled into the numbers, then took over like

A sense of slight-of-hand,
Like *tootings at the weddings of the soul*.

Pool-side and lake-side, myself
I sang for Susan where in slim adolescence
She did all but strip as Yeats's music fell from
Pan's disco's Delphic oracle and we saw goat-head,
Breast, bikinied bottom in the pages of a book
Dedicated, 1954, to
The Memory of Dylan Thomas—
Major Poet, Great man, Immortal Soul.
Thirty pages of the Great Man.
Fifteen pages of George Barker; ten of Oscar
Himself; one of the other Williams, W. C.;
None of T.S.E. (who offered none,
Thinking, I discovered later, that my
Much revered anthologist was self-serving, vain).
In what vein was Auden's *Pray for me*
And for all poets living and dead (?)
For there is no end to the vanity of our calling (?)
I skipped that at the time and flew with hawk
And helmeted airman: *Beckon your chosen out (!)*

The chosen still included: Masters and Bridges,
Masefield, Lindsay, Wylie, Waley
Houseman, Muir, Milay, &
Frederick Mortimer Clapp. By the time I'd
Sanded fifty pages like a deep valley
Cut through mountains when my Harvard book bag
tied onto the luggage rack of the motor bike
I rode those days fell and
Was dragged half the distance from Mountain View
To Stanford, many an Oscar was maimed.
Find also in the sou ought

Hearing it by sea
The sea
Was earth's shore
Even Mathew Arnold still was Modern—
Dover Beach an Oscar there between the Civil War
Of Melville and *Mikado's Song*.
The last poems, unsanded, were intact; the last line
with a confident finality declares:
The page is printed.

Francophiles, 1958

La transhumance du Verbe, incanted René Char.
And so we would repasture
in the tower-room and try to think in French
directed by a *berger* from Morocco. Frogs were in.
Brits and Yanks were out. Hell was other people
we'd proclaim, pointing out each other's *mauvaise foi*.
What was not absurd was certainly surreal, essence rushing
headlong at existence all the way from Paris to
Vaucluse. Over hills we sent our sheep with Cathar heretics—
through unsettled valleys into settled code. (One day
predatory age would eat our lambs, but that was
too far off to see): We went to bed with both Bardot
and de Beauvoir. Fantastic volunteers of *Le Maquis*, we
knew about Algeria, about
Dien Bien Phu . . .

Camus was in,
Steinbeck clearly out.
Sartre had overestimated novels by Dos Pasos.
Pesos paid the wage of Sisyphus to roll
his boulder up the hill;
dollars went a good long way on continental holidays
if you could catch the Maître's mistress
mouthing his enciphered wholly unacknowledged
fully legislative & heraldic letter: *d'* . . .

But SOE and FLN were not on anybody's SATs.
No trees blossomed into Hypnos Leaves.
No one gave us arms.
No one's army occupied our town, and not
a single paratrooper dangled in his harness from our tower.
Camus declared in Stockholm: *I'm no existentialist.*
But if obliged to choose between the works
of Justice and ma mère, I will choose ma mère.
That surprised us as we greedily

claimed Justice for our own—which was easy
with our mothers safe at home & cooking us authentic dinners
that we ate like old conspirators in jails.

Still, the poet transcribed secret words
directly in his poems.

They named the roads, the villages, coordinates for
sabotage, assassination, unforeseen attacks.

We heard a beeping in the wires, the bleating
of a little flock, a change of key in those reiterations
by Ravel when music, like the Word,
tumbles starving into green transhumant fields.

Don's Drugs

I read that teenage girls
Routinely send out naked pictures
Of themselves to boy friends
And even strangers on the Internet.
And then I think about my own
Generation of kids, staring only
At the movie magazines
In shops like Don's. We'd get
Our cherry cokes there too, and
Sometimes even have prescriptions
Filled. There was Marilyn, even Betty,
Though a little old; there was young
Liz Taylor—all in rather proper
One-piece bathing suits. We'd pretend
To be reading *Road and Track*, even
Classic Comics where I had
My first encounter with Shakespeare.
Ballooning out of Caesar's mouth—
Et Tu, Brute? What ballooned from
Half opened mouths of movie
Stars? (We never thought to wonder
What might enter them.)
Don would lurk about, watching
From behind the soda counter
With its five round stools you could
Spin when you got up to leave. Although
Eventually I owned the whole series
Of *Classic Comic Books*,
I remember best the movie mags I never
Bought. Marilyn! Betty! Liz!
And you, Brutus? Even he was headed
Through the aether toward those girls born

As we approached a *fin de siècle*.
Out there somewhere all of them,
Blooming & ballooned, are
Tangled in some lonely virgin's
Pixilated dream.

Ned's Sister, Pete's Dad

My neighborhood was pretty much divided
Between streets that crossed a hundred yards
Or so beyond the entrance to my drive:
Ned's street, out and to the right, or—
Out and to the left—Pete's. Although these
friends were neither Swanns nor, certainly,
Guermantes, they split my world in two.
And though I didn't know it then, part of
That division had to do with class. Ned's father
Didn't seem to be around, and his mother
Worked all day at the local five and dime.
His sister was in charge of him. Pete's father
Was Professor of pathology, School of Dentistry,
Ohio State University, Columbus. He'd line up
Slides for lectures on the family dinner table.
Knowing I got queasy when I saw them,
He'd laugh and hold one up and say, *Now*
That's pathological! Watch out whom you kiss.
I was twelve and hadn't kissed a soul.
But Ned's sister was fifteen and clearly had.
Pete claimed he'd kissed a girl once, down the
Road that led to Old Glen Echo Park.
His father held his slides up to the light.
Even now when I hear someone jesting—*Now*
That's pathological—I see diseased mouths,
Lesions on the lips, inflammation of the epiglottis,
Sets of toothless gums, bleeding and infected,
Or, most frightening of all, tongues already
Half cut away, maimed organs of speech.
He'd go to his class and flash these on the screen
With the keen enthusiasm of an art historian
Dissecting a Giotto. Ned's sister, I imagine, had
Already been debauched. I was once allowed
To take her picture in a bathing suit. She'd put

Things in her mouth, suck a mixing spoon
All full of icing for a cake. Ned would shout
Out *gross*, a word ruined by its use in situations
Just like this, as later *awesome* would be ruined
And recently, borrowed from the English, *brilliant*.
Was the slide I took of Ned's sister in her
Bathing suit and sucking on a spoon *brilliant*,
Awesome, or *gross*? Maybe it was all of these.
My parents didn't like me spending time
With Ned and his sister. They'd talk up Pete
Enthusiastically: *A boy that's bright and has
A future. Ned's not the kind of friend for you
To have.* When I'd mention anyone at all I'd met,
One or the other of them asked: *Who's he?*
They meant: Who is his father? I think Ned's father
Was a wino out of work, but then I only saw him
Once or twice and he never spoke to me at all.
Pete's dad would say: *Don't start drinking alcohol;
It causes eight different kinds of oral lesions
And can scar the esophagus and give you
Duodenal ulcers.* I have no idea what became of Ned.
He disappeared one week at summer's end along
With his mother and his sister. Dog days.
The house was up for sale. Pete became a periodontist
And the head of his department at Northwestern.
When my colleague Conrad Schaum came back
to Notre Dame after having been to Pete for surgery,
he looked as if he'd had his upper gums sewn up
by a Singer, stitches beautiful and regular and tight.
That friend of yours, he mumbled as I poured him
Out a drink, *is pretty good.* I said: *You should
Have known his dad, who used to scare me half
To death.* I saw Ned's sister last a week or so before
The family left our neighborhood. She rolled back