



SUSQUEHANNA

SUSQUEHANNA:

Speculative Historical Commentary and Lyric

(FIRST PART: THE LUNAR PERSPECTIVE)

DALE SMITH

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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This book is dedicated to Richard

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PROLOG : THE ARGUMENT



The illustration is a woodcut-style drawing, split into two horizontal panels. The top panel shows a large, white, fluffy animal, possibly a dog or a bear, standing on a dark, hatched ground. To its right, a person is riding a horse, and further right, another person is walking. The bottom panel shows a person in a long, flowing white robe standing on a dark, hatched ground. To their right, a dog is sitting, and in the background, there is a building with a thatched roof and two windows.

Keep looking for a way

out of deadlock:

CAPITAL

and its insidious endless drives

but who stands

in position

to offer the briary hope

of twisted passage

down river

dumped into sludge

of Chesapeake

One task remains stern:

to enjoy these last fruits

squeezed by rote

while suffering goes intenser

as the more grabbed

becomes nothing

of the goods

of China India

and the body count

of Mesopotamia

Filter the many images

across flat screens

and this is no dream

the squatters' shacks of

Lagos gorgeous in the hazy

despair of human misery

flash each instant

gone the days of

easy ignorance when now it

comes hard earned

in the corroded corridors

of psyche

yet why look

beyond the banks of

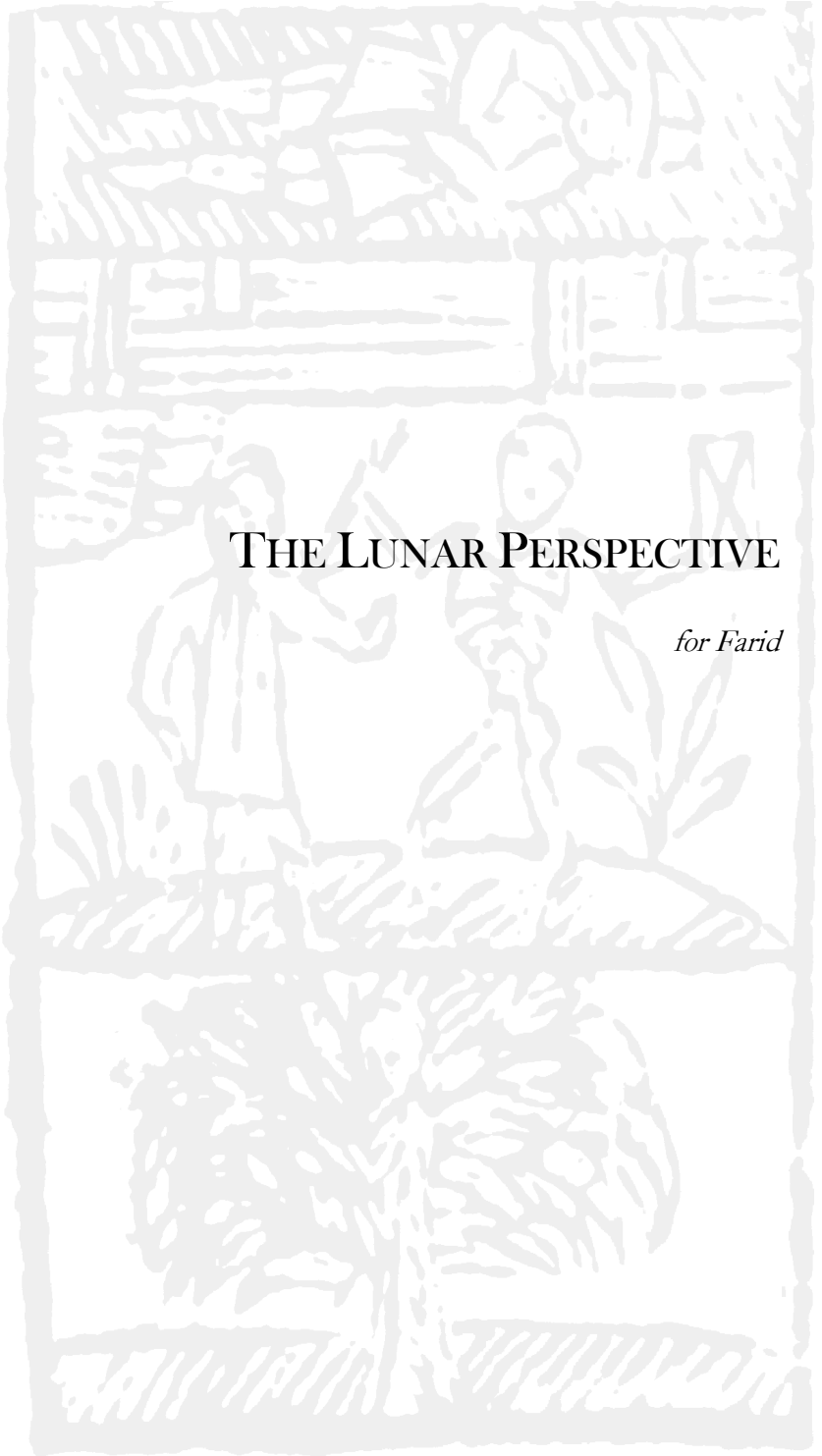
native waters
enough mean life
eats its way inward
with ethnic fates and
methamphetamine nightmares
of knowing
how what flows also
offers its atemporal prejudice
an interior risk
some small thing
for the sake of any hope
or quick kill
of the suicide's note
the river's Ash
its Maple its Pine
continue to open
a path where others
have traveled against hard meaning

to glimpse outside this place
that other geography
an erupting force
of self
failure and anti-heroic
commonplace knowledge
of the cell's quick determination
from within to negate
the environmental assault
of organism
and I hesitate to say it
so crudely here
dividing myself with
resistant streams
as Coleridge, Southey, Sarah Fricker
others in their day
saw it—the grim
game of it—here

that revolution fails with the human
arrogance of it
crashing along into middle age
responsibilities
a surplus perspective
black water where berries
ripen beyond reach
except where children swim
through catfish water to reach
the first moist fruit eyes
go full on them
looking into the depths
that water
its muddy bottom where
curling up next to salamanders
and other life aquatic
the adult specimen
turns blue in inert

homeostasis not even
flapping about but
calmly observant as
the passing images bring
this creature back
naked
rising
in its filth
to mime what remains unspoken
whole lives
even now
in the air
and elocutions
wet with that vision
perverted narratives
told whenever
limbs tremble
or children cry out

unformed glimpse
a word in some far
embankment
some periphery
where things meet
to go on
blunt membrane exposed
splitting the inside
bent over
crooked
undelivered
from the summer shadows
of Susquehanna



THE LUNAR PERSPECTIVE

for Farid

See canoes on water

Move in the night loon air

Fire burns in a wood

Turning spark on fresh meat

What brings us here

Put down to word

A passage of season

And below the Chesapeake



In England some few dreamed

And their vision

Became a Book of Life

Because like life it too

Failed and overthrew

Whatever terror sinks

A soul into its bitter habits

Provoked at every turn

By what could have been

Made to recommend

What will be



BLACKBOARD & CANDLE WAX

...first you mark out the place where it all happened and this demarcation of the historical place creates along its boundaries the nonhistorical place where nothing has happened in any developmental way and there is no history only anthropology...

— DAVID ANTIN

If anyone cared
What were they thinking
That it would rain
That the sky would return
With warm air or wind
The sails open to the breeze
Across Atlantic
Energy to this wild form
The mind's toxicity
And blossoming fever
For more

In Europe young men planned
a utopia on the banks
of the Susquehanna
properties freely shared
in *sensus communis*
a dream that men and women
would partake equally
in the resources of this land

Something arrived
to the mind Shakespeare
might not have recognized
: innate slate : market
empirical pyre in the Lockean eye
the mechanicals made the world in their likeness
smithied up a way of seeing
through the invention
of the lens

To keep the beat of the masses in mind
we are taught the beauties of poetry
composition at blackboard
and candle wax
stains our sleeves
we are instructed
to develop our taste
an innate faculty God grants those
in some superior to others
and apprehend
art and nature
in symmetries and
craggy terror sublime

Study thy rhet'rick

word tricks that stick

the mind to its subject

a method of redemption

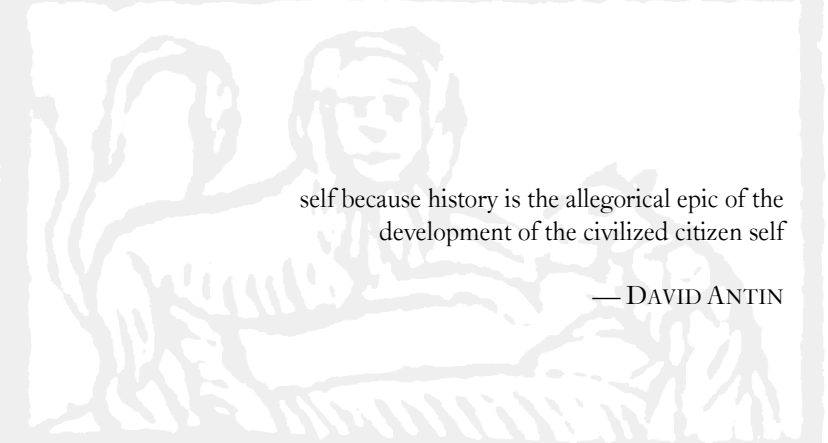
to perform in our roles

they allow us to know

Look back all those years ago
What arrived on the breeze
To inspect the pines
And grind the pupil's moral worth
Up early in worrisome toil
Scratch the soil thine own
Not thy brother's not
The Pantisocratic commune
Compose the vast distance of the Self
Slated with clarity and purpose
To know thy will
On this grim earth
Our Lord and Master All



PUMPKIN PATCH BUMKINS



self because history is the allegorical epic of the
development of the civilized citizen self

—DAVID ANTIN



What happens when people
get a taste for leisure and schooling
the goods flow in
tobacco : indigo
cotton : opium

The revolution came

to Manchester / Liverpool

And Edinburgh took

the best of Europe's

common sense

Smith & Malthus

measure goods and population

call it people

proletariat

the swarming insatiable scenes

of multitude

From Christ's Hospital to Bristol

came a young preacher

abolitionist reformer radical

servant of revolution

His seal: S T C

And with Southey and their companion

of Latin and Greek

alone on southern coast

the Quaker town frenetic in their

word sensual youth touching

dream of Susquehanna

Empiricist empire

of perception : 18th C

Enlightenment

makes the magicks

of sight and measure

: along the Waller Creek

creek bed limestone walls

and a canopy of green cypress limbs

take the play of winter

sunlight on its surface

This one dream: to get away
 fuels imagination
makes hope heave
 to fecund possibility
the romantic impulse
 of the '90s
 for pleasure and
 purpose
to place the body with itself
fact of its perceptions
 agent of history
 failing
the lovely play of the garden
Southey's future grounded Englishness
 laureate
lover of children kittens
 and secluded hearth

Hard to imagine

Elocution in those days

before electronic media :

sit us hours before our books

Aeneid

portions of our Latin readers

and around us sang the birds

father and mother worked the little plot

labor and our education

concerned them less with the change of season

toward summer harvest

new world fruit bore aplenty and in

our parlor long the winters passed

reciting Burke or Cicero

and lines of *Julius Caesar*

Who are we

slated by master

ingesting the word

even the pleasure of poetry

a summer shower and green fields of Pennsylvania

they never reached nor the snows

on straw thatch carts

on open road

a school house : a court house

privilege of skin and yeoman peasantry

I am an old man of old world stock

my words taken at ma's teat

and the gone sense of things : revolutions

the measure of grief

in William's *Michael*

we are what we do and feel

the pleasure of

a young woman's weight
given to the pasture hay stacks
learned us our scripture and speech
to be good : work hard
and be fed

Of great speculation:

What if they had come

to Susquehanna?

Pumpkin patch bumpkins

of *belle-lettres* tromping along the roiling rills

of Shenandoah

Imagine Melville in that stuff

no opium and failure and German

Idealism to grate the brain

for Coleridge otherness

resides in the wind and we

have been emptied of

any seeming significance

Turning to the nightmare flux of image

resistant tales of cosmic purpose

a Mariner adrift at sea

to meet and dream

And was it wind
Aeolian breeze
Bending the dreamer
To its substance
Free to labor
Under words
Men made mean
To one another
Maturity used to sub-
Late youth's hopeful
PANTISOCRACY
In them something
Others spurned
The social drift of
Governance
Land ripe with fruit
The belly's swollen bell

With child and the haunting

Terror who could know

Dreams come with

Horrific human traffic

And revolution's failure

Bleak stream's black bilious bounce

Morning rain mourning

The remainder of a life

Wave good-bye ye sunk ones

Decline thy nouns on Ovid's line

The word the word

Of polite

Company parlor talk

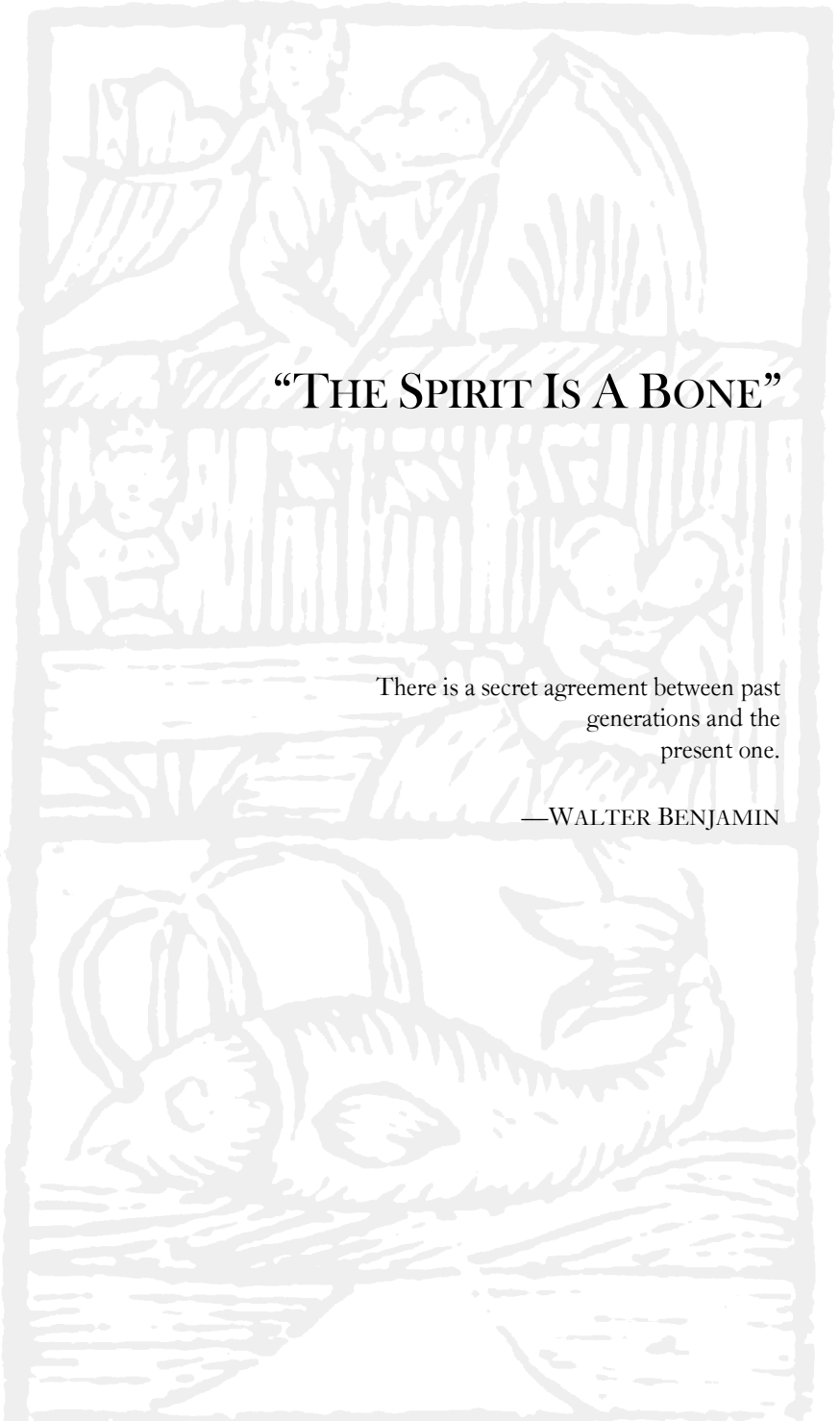
His limbs hardened

Grew barky with green nodes

Leaves spread full upon him

Words go

Words go



“THE SPIRIT IS A BONE”

There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one.

—WALTER BENJAMIN

Come to the word

alive and glow

candles in winter thin

ice on water

Spell the force of life

slating the known

going off in the frost

the morning window

taking eyes

Nothing in snow

beyond the self

not “beyond” but

in its place the rote

routines of spell and memory

fail except

feeling the cold’s lectern

reading what’s not printed

enter the room



Not failure—a rupture. When we look at revolution, Benjamin says, we should not dwell on the resulting re-immersion into tyrannical powers. The Great Man dissolves fantastically under weight of the multitude—the people—whose transparent energy leaks through things. A sense of purpose guides the human bone.

What remains—the possibility—and failed promises haunt the spectral paths of history. Wherever we turn, there we are, facing an ethical question. To whom do we turn? Or what in us can we succumb to the rigor of hope?

“Even in the deserts of America, where human nature shews itself in its most uncultivated state, the savages have their ornaments of dress, their war and their death songs, their harangues, and their orators.”

—Hugh Blair

Look out across the shadow

Loss brings its own self-evidence

The rushing waters of Paradise

Deluge the happy fields

As if it were that simple

To catch a fish or skin

A deer the dear hart's home

Start the signal protest

“The Spirit Is a Bone”

Wandering away from the meat that

Meets us back at some

New day

Firefly and cricket toad

Along those banks

Along the failing paths of image

Dream thus dear Dead Thing

Mobile machine Destiny

ANAPHORA

Arrive at your self-destiny
Arrive in a field of Daffodils
Arrive in London drunk on laudanum
Arrive square in your domesticity
Arrive to your self's true silence
Arrive shattered by that blankness
Arrive as images that haunt
Arrive to scare you back into the gritty nowhere streets
Arrive remaindered from the Dream
Arrive the Susquehanna

Midnight frost—

Cries the babe

That ball of light

Recalled from him

Inhuman terror

Took up unto the moon

February 1790s

Cold to a certain substance and

Revolt of nature

In what secret Ministry

There remains

Vanishing to appearances some Truth?

In perplexity all things

A father's love

In negative matter

Fleeting traces of industry

If so loved the world arrived...

A place where you could stand

Frost on Grasmere delirium

My father was a wicked man

This I bring to honor him

New boots a great coat and his snuff

All father's come as wicked men

Cruel selfless honesty

Selfish driven despair of knowing

The end brings no ending but

More opium opprobrium

●

For how long shall we look for the lost thing until we decide it's gone? Our experiences fill up with the residues of the past. Images float up in memory to restore our paths here among the immaterial products of human flesh. Gone are the trains and engines of steam; gone the clear-cut fields where grouse rise black on grains; gone the simple garments of industry: butter churn, fermented cabbages, the drip of whey from cheese cloth.

Memory retraces the past as it forms in us. Is all lost? The rising seas. Withered crops. Intensity of the sun's white heat.

When looking into the past should we not find those interstices where things meet? Imagination forms there, carrying forward what-could-have-been into the inherited world we have. Or is it something more sinister at stake? That we will not imagine another world? That all remains lost? Even ourselves from ourselves?

What sacrifice must be offered to spark that force of memory? The technologies of the automobile and computer relate our appetites through space. Perhaps it is our nature, so to say, to narrow the distance between ourselves and reality, to distinguish in appearances some core, some real of the original world. And yet, that wilderness of the eighteenth century returns with its wild gorges and violent plunging depths. And isn't it this wildness that haunts us? Halts us? Freezing our steps?

Walk away from the Green
Wilds of north
Country
Go by coach to the City
Smog
The grey of starlings
Clouds dusky skies as
In a notebook 1799
Coleridge relates such a
Notion of a soul in him
Multiplied
In flight west and sun
Goes out on
The chimney-sweep black of
London

“A cultivated taste increases sensibility to all the tender and humane passions, by giving them frequent exercise; while it tends to weaken the more violent and fierce emotions.”

—Blair

In ink a sprite

voice cracks a skull

penning rank submission

The water goes for many miles

into the thickness

of Shenandoah

Yeomen plant

they dance in a derangement

put their seed

into the earth

and in the wet there shines him

taken in the piney growth

to spread his garments on the soil and force

a kind of love

“this strong uneven Land is covered with Beech, Sugar Maple, Ash
and various other sorts of Wood...”

—Richard Smith

So much of the past breaks

under weights

Of each step or stroke

of paddle the salmon

Absorb its heathen

haven of fecund seeding

O Lord All

Nothing intent to come

Lay claim on my ill-purpose

wander beyond wet membrane

Of separation to enchant

thyself's clear goneness

Knife in deer's carcass

its stripped meat mine to make

Meals cold nights to come

o Good-for-Nothing ripping mind

Leave enough to be many

minded pressed

Into the book

bone-grinding parchments

Bark upon black water

“The overcoming of capitalism by migration.”

—Walter Benjamin

What comes from the known

orchards and

hay fields—eternal

turning of goods through

desire of

food a decent

labor shared equally

with books and study

for the mind and children

to satisfy the flesh

in its kinetic drives

pushing out on land

or seaward exhausted

for something better

wind water field

children

lost in the progress

of their wants

To want full table

To seek maple leaf

To drive bleak wastes

To saunter Grasmere hills

To please thy dependants

To scrive this wreck of mind

To drop the distilled essence

To taste dreamy division

To determine the inside from without

Linden, Iron Wood, Some Chestnut, a few Blac, red and White Oak,
Shell bark, Hiccory Together with Button wood, Ash, Hemloc...

—Richard Smith

With these wayward plans Coleridge

fled Enlightenment for Laudanum

organic creatures of profit

surplus

sea-weary

land-worn

Notebooks stuffed in pockets

New boots

Weather turned

Far off Malta's bougainvillea

another paradise awaited

But not the one

one would have

but that determined

by other turns

of circumstance

aggrieved

HER AN OPIATE

Her wet body enters
Your lips and your lips
Melt into numbness
Where what hope remains
Derives its essence
From barley spirits
And poppy pleasures
Of East India Co.
Drags her here
Beyond the Hebrides
Across Atlantic
Drifts of sorrow
Seamen washed
Of all but bone
Breathing heavily in the harrow
Of ship's hull
Constipated you turn
In humility and pain
Shit cuts through your guts
You see her lean
Into your face aggrieved
That we here too
Have New Land
Ghosts hurting our heads
Enlightenment deities this
Blood and bone
Exchange



Voices from the past sometimes finally reach a destination in our present. Imagine a word left mute 200 years. And suddenly by sudden novelty its charge explodes upon the unlucky traveler who must feel as if a ghost has just thrust its immaterial weight forward.

And what if we in some distant future speak back through time to shift that destiny of words we have left behind? Is it not possible for a voice from beyond to alter our postmodern enslavement to happiness—to perhaps leave some word of hope behind that will bring us into confrontation with singularity? Where is it these words journey? To whom are our desires meant? Is this not how we are instructed by desire? To know not what we want, but in what frame of reference we must choose to have it? This is the ethical moment—the situation—against history—to undermine its power in us—making it new—renewing the world through words we are capable of feeling.

“using the past to fill in the present”

—John G. Taylor

Want good things to come

For everyone

Enough field and grain for all

Populations spurting hungrily

O Susquehanna

Why won't you speak about your own

Determination from within

Each mineral form excites

Its own development

Observe the twig

With ants

Below the Blac oak where

I was thinking about a Day

Before I was born

And there were people doing things
To live
That if I were to believe in them
We might change again
Prepared for what we are
To become
In dynamic motion of division
And return us
Restore the muddy ground
Of adventure

SANTA MUERTE

“The spirit is a bone” (Hegel)

and so from within

freedom’s contingency

on form contrives

release



Swallows at dusk above black limbs

a city’s scrubby inert presence

Cloud of swallows spanning heaven

Coleridge: could he anticipate

rebirth on a London stage or

coming back from the dead

opiate haze to grasp Schelling’s mimesis

Berkeley died a child

Of small pox vaccine

Spirit of Death with him

in the Black Forest

Santa Muerte she was called

in the New World

Scandalous prayers to Her

attend thy need

KAIROS

A time will come

out of the depth of your experience

to mask instruction

turn you out of land

the dogwood afternoons of summer

harvests going into fall ripeness

A time will come

when those waters carry

away the surplus of the country

and appetites reveal aping agencies

a bitterness in the wind

in the shadow of what you are ashamed of

A time will come

and the ethical hesitation

leaves you stranded in some

historical moment perceived

years later in cherrywood

surfaces of frame round a mirror

A time will come

to see through your mask

to ask yourself between sips

of flask whisky

how this fruition returns

to mark your wealth

A time will come

taking measure

when what inside reveals

what's beyond its membrane

surface shadow flickering

if the cave wall's all there is

A time will come

breaking through the present

with aching intensity
to see the coach as it stops
relieving its passengers
of travel's burden
A time will come
in Sugar Maples
and moist air
where you do not matter
in abundance of such green
hardly differentiated

A time will come
to read the texts of Nature and
fall with fear into the stream
of Susquehanna
toiling under poppy vision
to see new day come

Like the Wingbow Press edition of Ed Dorn's *Slinger*,
most of this book was set in Caslon Old Face.
Parts of this book were also set in Basker
ville Old Face, Palatino Linotype,
& Georgia. Interior images
culled from various
18th century
New Eng
land primers.
Front cover image
of Britain from John Seller's
1690 *Hydrographia Universalis*. Rear
cover image from Seller's *A New Systeme of
Geography*, 2nd Edition, also published in 1690.
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