



ON THE EDGE

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Revisiting Lake Bidy

We grow old. Then older.
Obscurely.

At the window of my cousin's house
I smoke one last cigarette.

The smoke drifts slowly
into the evening
where the delicate gimlets
are now vague with darkness.

A thin wind moving over the paddocks
disturbs them.

Behind me, in our borrowed bed,
my wife sighs.

Perhaps her eyes, weary of seeing bare paddocks, dry
salt lakes, dust,
burn like the parched eyes of sheep.

Perhaps she sighs for the reassurances
of familiar flesh.

Or does she dream of our green youth,
that imperfectly remembered country,
that never-to-be-revisited land
of smooth skin, resolute flesh, and eyes
that smiled without irony?

Does she yearn for what she thinks we were

as, now, in the cool night air,
this earth remembers rain?

Absence

'I see now all these deaths are to one end –
whereby I lost a foe, friend upon friend –
room . . .' Another seminar, another year;
we're here still.

From our classroom windows we look down on
an upstate New York clutter of concrete,
clapboard, truncated trees. A junction city;
cars, trucks, cars . . .

Hard to believe it was mostly water once:
marshes, creeks and lakes where, alert,
assured, the turtle-loving Iroquois
would hunt. All

those lovely waterlands of myths and origins,
those marshes of meaning, are lost, irretrievably.
Absence abides here. Thruways, highways
make it easy

for anyone who comes to go. Our patrimony
is lovelessness. (Ah, love. *Love*. That much-advertised
resort! To be in love, to escape into
ourselves . . . Driving

out, nights, we dream of possibilities, snow
wandering the long unlovely streets.) Absence
prevails: Hedrington, Berryman dead; friends
gone; ourselves

(alert, wary) less than we were, clinging
to vestiges, imperfect memories . . .
Snow falls and the room darkens a little.
We consider,

heads bowed, the poem. 'Soul upon soul, in the high Andes, blue
but blind for turns. And this is where the mind
stops. Death is a box.' And as we hunt, in our darkening
room, for hidden

meanings, snow is falling, the land is hardening, a car
is hurtling off a road somewhere, and high on a bridge
above a freezing river a man is waving,
waving, waving.

Islands

Islands which have
never existed
have made their way
on to maps nonetheless.

And having done so
have held their place,
quite respectably,
sometimes for centuries.

Voyages of undiscovery, deep
into the charted wastes,
were then required
to move them off.

The Auroras, for instance.
Beneath Cape Horn.
Sighted first in 1762
and confirmed by
Captain Manuel de Oyarvido
thirty years later.

But since the voyage of
someone whose name
escapes me, on a date
I can't quite remember –
they are now known
not to exist.

Cartographers – hands high
in the frail rigging of
latitudes and longitudes –
wiped them out, reluctantly.

And so, some mariners,
who pushed beyond the pale,
forfeit the names they left
in lonely seas.

Remember them.
Respect their enterprise.
It takes a certain
kind of boldness
to have seen such
islands first of all.

In the mind's atlas,
footnotes, like broken rules,
are not without importance.

Who found America?

Those canny trawlers,
absent for months,
fishing the depths,
must have been somewhere
with their sealed lips.

Silhouettes

I

As at nightfall.
When only the outline
can be seen —
the rest of whatever
it is (the sun behind it)
turning black.

Put it that way
and see what happens.

Sooner or later,
he will have you out
on the lawn, your boy;
hands outstretched
to the sky, those trees,
a chimney-pot, or that . . .

Bits and pieces
of the day disappearing.
Things turning black.
Until only the outline
can be seen.

But seen like that,
more real then
than we care to admit;
etched into memory.

Like the two of us
out there on the lawn,
one summer evening.