

This and **That**

⋮

a biography

Joe Napora

This and That : a biography

I can draw a thousand maps,
but I am only ever talking about time.

Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*

This and That : The Demonstration

This is the beginning. **That** is obvious.
How could it not be? I am determined.

This has been determined,
not to lie. Lie about?

The obvious. **That** is obvious.
This is not. It cannot be.

That must be proven.
And yet how?

About **that** it cannot be written. Nor said.

There it is above. The large crack.
That makes a line thin and fat

from the wall at the window
to the door. And **that** was
where the first story began.

And then how many years? And then it ended.
That was the least of it, this story.

But it was the only one I had.
And it continues
and consumes everything.

It is inevitable. **That** someone arrives.
This has to happen.

It is not the beginning

but a beginning. **That**
should be obvious.

I think; therefore,
I am wrong about all of **this**.

That this person has the key
to **that** door.

It is a long walk down the corridor
from **this** door to **that**.

At one time, so my story went,
and now goes for **that**
corridor leads to another,
at **that** time there were many,
and I hesitate to say us,
many together. I was lucky.

That is not the right word.
But I was.

I had a bunk and a blanket.
And I could lie down.
And look up, at **that** crack.
The others stood.

Mingled bodies. They looked
at each other. At me. I looked up.

Taking notes. I was suspect.
I had a pen and paper.
I was under the blanket,
on the bunk. I. Aye. Eye.

They were talking. And then they left.
The door was not locked. **That** was
the beginning of the story.

Here and There : The Questioning

What was **here** after all? It wasn't **there**.
That much is certain. **There**
were several people all unknown to me.

In the **here** and now. What?
It's the word hat. What hat?
I wasn't wearing one.
I was warm because I was **there**
under the blanket. They were talking
but not to me. I was under the blanket.

Trying to be not noticed.
A double negative.
And who was more comfortable?

There they were standing,
pacing, as much as was possible
in that confined space. A box. A cell.

And now I notice for the first time.
There is the word pace in space.
In English. French? Space is espace.
Pace is le rythme. Rhythm? Rhythm is rhythm.
But Rythm'e could be pace. It's possible.

But not a popsicle.
There has to be some kind of order

here. Spanish. Rhythm is ritmo.
Pace is paso. I walk out.
The door was not locked.
Wasn't it so? I read it here and there
it is. Forever.

Then and Now : Evasions or In

Then we find out. There was no trial.
A fine for bad acting. Acting bad.
Now. Fine. There
must have been, **then**,
a line that I crossed
over. That little song.

Step on a crack,
break your mother's back.
Step on a line,
break your mother's spine.

Now it's a way to connect.
Umbilical. **Then** from under the blanket
I took notes. Knots. Gordian.
But how to untie them?
Unite? Under line them?

Use a sWORD like the Great Alexander
then. **Now** I think of Bartleby.

My old friend Gordan, last name Maham.
Then he did three years at the prison in my town.
Then they said War. **Then** he said I prefer not.
After the CIA protest a hundred
and more sat waiting. Names called.

Then the clerk yelled out
Mayhem, Gordan. Laughter
assaulted the armed police
in a line around the courtroom.
The judge was not interested.
Or amused. Now pay the fine
and then go home. Where?
To your mother. Fine.

To and From : Ambulation

It's not hard, difficult,
to get there. But it takes time.

And time is a burden.
Is heavy.

And what is there?
Across the border.
Home. Mother.
A memory.
Any of that?

From here to there.
One step at a time.
The place is arbitrary.
It can be exchanged from
time to time.
San Francisco to
St. Johns New Brunswick.
From one giant step.
Mother may I?

Take your boots, the nine league boots.

But there is no direction
from this to that.

The actors assemble here.

The director is absent there.

That's a problem. There
is a universal GPS.

That's a problem.

Humble and Jumble : A Rest

In the park, the Golden Gate,
he hears a nursery rhyme:

Humble and Jumble
were sweethearts.

No. **Humble and Jumble**
were sitting in a tree,
K-I-S-S-I-N-G. No.

Politics were everywhere
at that time. This.
The song finished -E -R.

The Allende election. The killing.
Victor Jara playing.
The alphabet: A T & T and C I A.
Henry and Richard sitting in a tree.

The Gate to nowhere.
Stay **humble**. Be here now.
What a con. Now here.
Nowhere.

As if it is over. And out.
Over there. Here.
There's a **jumble**.
Where the one law lies.
Where the bombs are falling.
Where the hunting season is open
on young Black males.

Be **humble**. Be lost.
Listen to the Panthers' roar.
It's a rumble in the **jumble**.

Faith and Nonsense : Sacrifice

Nonsense is nothing.
No thing.
No sense.
Be sensible.
Be real.
Have faith.

Take your son to the mountain.
Take your knife. Not your wife.
Take your radio. And listen to the voice.

There is a war going on.
Over there. Over here.
Different uniforms.
It was routine the good cop bad cop.
A file folder taped over the mirror.
It could have been a confession.
You are drafted.

Not this time. Priests and cops.

Different uniforms. After absolutes.
Not many. The.
There is no universal. Not one.
No **faith**. Your son is safe.
You don't give him up
for **nonsense**.

Exit and Exist : Confusion

It was the wiggle. Shake.
And our heads rattled.
Roll Over Beethoven.
Chuck Berry. Jerry Lee.

What did we know?
We **exist**.

And, perhaps, there
is that sign above that door.

Exit. In red. Lips. Finger nails.
Blush. I wanted to say.
We wanted to stay.

I would break the pencil.
She would sit to take roll.
Call the names. Check.

We **exist**.

Then rise. And walk to the sharpener.
Turn away. Turn the handle.
Tight skirt. Poetry.
In motion.

Great Balls of Fire.
It was rock and roll.

No **exit**.

Unite and Untie : Fusion

It was the final cigarette.
Flipped into the bath water.
Untie me from the addiction.

A people **united**
cannot be defeated.

Helicopters.
Search lights sweeping
across People's Park. Clashes.
Classes cancelled.

Untie the ropes. Bodies. **Unite**.

How much does it cost?
Free speech?

I left for a job in Canada.

Up and Down : the Mainstream

The paddle goes **up** to the air. Rescue.
And hits rock. Daylight into night.

Down. In a cave of lost desire.

But no. Not the drowning man.
Not this one.

Up river is an eddy.
A safe place in the chaos
of the down river current.
Water flows in every direction.
Only one gives you up to the water god.

But you take the whole thing in pieces.
A refuge in the eddy. Down time.

Stability within fluidity.
A rhyme as cheap as any. Many.

But of one thing there is
no doubt. It's chance.
A pair of dice.
That's paradise.

In and Out : The Mirror

In the living room.
It's what we called it then.
The light was out. We sat.
Her hand in mine.
The last thing she said
when she was she :
Take care of your teeth.

In its own simple way,
this is a matter of reflection.
And it is out of my hands.

I could do no more
than a cover up.
Towels over the mirrors.
And that is never enough.

In the mirror men lurked,
not the right word
in the beginning. Then
they were welcome.

They drew her out
of herself. Forty years alone
with herself. Relief.
And constant company.

Lurked in the end
was the right word.
Those faces were not familiar.
In or out of the mirror.
Every surface was a broadcast.
These faces were not familiar.
In other words, that word,

the most cruel:
familiar. *family liar*
The most cruel.

Not.
Who am I?
But.
Who are you?

Fire and Water : Rapid Motion

The sun reveals itself
as desert fire. Scorpio
tracks through the campsite.
(Caution. Check your boots.) Fire
pan to collect ash. The words
not said. 120 degrees in the sun. Baby
Light My Fire.

Water within and without
mercy. It's called Lava.
It's called the Big Ditch.
It's water on fire.
It's skin alive in real time.

Let's take a walk
down the desert path
where you can choose
to put foot upon foot
upon rock and upon sand
or go back
take water for what it is
and flow in
to your sorry self
and go. No
matter what.
You go down.
Glory. Water
to water. Fire
next time.
After the rapid.
Drink it up. A saved
single malt. Fire.
Water.

Forget & Memory : Divorce

It's not exactly a choice
to get to **memory**
if **forget-**
able. Table it? Or,
Hey! **Forget** about it.
Like some motion?
Rules of Order?
At the end of the line **forge-**
table. Or **memory**
able? Either way it is
distance. Say you listen to
the wind. It will not tell you
First go read a book. **Forget** if able
to make the sound a **memory**.

I walked into the ocean
at Tracadie. The **memory**
is the stretched and shifted
shore line of white sand and
I left my mark upon it
waited for the tide to come and over
take me with it and
it was then I walked clean
out of a marriage. Now
a mirage. **For...**
get the way to set
the table. Yet. No one
is coming for dinner.

Stumble & Mumble : Education

One word on a line.

It's the beginning. And
it's tripped you (**stumble**)
up. The line.
The line of the sign hung round
your neck. You're labeled. (**mumble**)
It's done. And never undone.
You can't read it.
You can't see it.
It's an advertisement
for your self.
You've been seduced.
And reduced.
No amount of hanging
out will make you
one of the gang.

You think it's talk.
It's not even a whisper.
Mumble. mumble
It's a crack that's ready
to make you **stumble**.

He talks (**mumbles**).
I **stumble** away from
the bar. It's me or
the bartender who
shouts
It makes no
difference who.

Tanzania and Tennessee : The Building

In the beginning it was a tipi
with mold stained canvas

and icicles dripping in
to the fire. It was a place
to stay to watch the summer
sun sweep away the chilled
night air. It was long
before **Tanzania**. Long
before **Tennessee** and the need
to make some thing last
beyond the moment.

Gimme Shelter. Take it.
Make it. The Maasai
mud huts (**Tanzania**), then logs
lifted by hand (**Tennessee**). My
Tennessee Mountain Home
on a hill in Virginia. The border
line, the main street of Bristol.
The line that separates the Massai
gathering cattle and goats into
the yard ringed tree limbs
from the electric wired sheep pasture
and the dog that guards them. That text
from the cell phone deep
in the bush. He learned to write
Swahili to send messages.
Tanzania to **Tennessee**.

There and **Here** : 1990, 1970

It's a fact not an act
on Reality TV. **There**
is a hole in the metal sculpture
at Kent State. **Here** put
your finger through it.

It's an act not a fact
about what happens **there**
when the News says wholly
nothing about the killings
at Jackson State. **Here** put
your finger on it.

Or Cambodia. Nixon puts
his finger on the button.
"Bombs they are a falling" **there**.
"When will we stop them?" **here**.
At Kent 20 years later I carry
my paper maché mask of
The SEE-EYE APE
to the memorial poetry reading
do my shtick
then throw it in the trashcan.
Here it belongs.

There in New Brunswick Canada
I shuffle seed packs and wait
for the snow to melt. (t/**here**)

Hand and Head : The Paper Boy

He rose from the dead
end of funny money. So much
for Sunday a little less
for the Daily. Some you just got
to **hand** it to them. He knows he read
something about fools
gold and words that are as real
as pebbles and stones. Where

is his **head** after all? Not at home
where his dad disappointed
with the job he did with the electric
sander sands the floor by **hand**.

Some papers he places behind
the screen doors. Some
he throws from his bike. All
are used to turn
their minds into vapor.
And to every customer
he shows the news
paper and fears
to make the collection.

At such an early age. His **hand**
over his heart. He pledges allegiance
to pull down from the stairway
to heaven every other paper
boy ahead of. Hymn. Amen.

Helen and Paris : A Romance (for **Helen** Broomell)

Two hundred mile long logging
road raising dust devils with **Helen**
driving. **Paris** a thousand miles longing
and a year away. She awoke
to see a brown bear shake
the dew and dirt and look down
at her in the canoe. **Helen** rocking
herself to sleep on the river. Alone
released from the need of a man
to show her the way down

the mighty Yukon. Paris
a thousand miles and a year
away. Passing Rabelais Lake while reading
The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel laughing
through Montmartre hearing Dylan singing
“Everyone must get stoned.” Now
through Paris, Kentucky
it could have been Curtis Mayfield’s
“People Get Ready There’s a Train a Comin’”
while Helen baked a blueberry pie
and we packed up waiting
to load the canoes and gear
onto the train back to Armstrong.

Write and Might : Nicaragua

The poetry reading as if
it mattered. The contra
diction. Young soldiers
at the arena to listen to English
speaking poets from the US.
I might not, like “I prefer not”, listen
and walk away to the ruins.

At the Literacy Museum a surround
of photos of young teachers
killed by Reagan’s mercenaries.
A young woman not shot
by an Ollie North wanna be
sits taking tickets and watching
Disney cartoons. And you might
think I exaggerate. Write a note
and post it on the cathedral
ripped up by the earthquake.

Abode and Abide : Aliens

It began with putting a completed house on a head instead of a working plan in hand. Invasions of the mercenaries as The Boss sang “Born in the USA”. Home bodies reading “On the Road” from beginning to their end. Containment camps the new **abode**. Time turns into **abide**. Woody resurrected sings “Whose Side are You on?” Baba Ram chants “May the Circle Be Unbroken” as the line unrolls to the cliff edge.

The rich boy I debated at Miami U sings Queen’s “We Will Rock You” buys land on the high plateau sells Florida real estate. Dreams of heavenly rides at his personal amusement park. I said, I can’t **abide** this shit.” He said, “Private property it’s my, you heard me, **abode**.”

Eyes and Ears : The Police

“Polis is **eyes**”—Charles Olson
Polis is **ears** —Bugs Bunny

I forget where but somewhere written in Plato’s Dialogues Socrates warns his audience who only existed in writing about writing and how it lead to forgetting and it lead to knowing

that one did not earn. (That's **earn**
in **learn** and lead rhyming with dead.)
That's knowing rhyming with sowing
the seeds of the Alt. Right, with Hitler
and Trump at home at Animal Farm.
Black Lives Matter statistically on the slab
at the morgue. The Big Man knows
frustration is a contradiction resolved
by getting up close and personal by
looking you in the **eye** and breathing in
to your **ear**. "What exactly's up Doc?"

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