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Now

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VI

Now, day's last light dies in the pebbled yard,
And the manic winds of March betray the season.
We stop and listen. The bells, sound without reason,
Summon the sailor seaward, the nun to prayer.
Where there is time, time is its own reward.
We say goodbye. I turn and go, but stay
Fixed forever in your parting stare.
Eastward, the darkness that the doves are bringing;
But in the street, a boy prolongs his play,
Now murmuring to himself, now softly singing.

Now

You come over a hill, suddenly,
late afternoon or early evening
on 6A to Beach Point. Provincetown
to Long Point Light, a yellow,
dissolving Venice by Whistler
or Monet. Bay flat. Silver
grey. Dark blue further out.
I'm not talking about the past.
I'm talking about my sister,
my wife, myself, — all of us
travelling without reservations.
I'm talking about three small
sails tacked on the far horizon.
At Shoreline Village, cabins
1930's, sixty bucks a night
and twenty yards from salt water,
my sister talks about shells.
Sister Whine. Sister Twinkle.
Fifty years a nun this spring
and all No to my Yes. A taste
for dull food, and expensive
Irish whiskey in her tea. Next

door, our neighbors play volley-
ball without a net, their little
girls shrieking like sea-birds.
Danielle. Michelle. Julie.
I'm not talking about childhood.
I'm saying when the tide here
goes out its long mile at dusk,
the bay's a wet barnyard where
a dozen boats strand and heel over,
and clambers rake the golden muck
for steamers. Later, the years
come down slowly like stars
on Mama's West Dennis or Harwich
or wherever we summered the fall
she died, hundreds of herring-fry
shoaling and sparkling in a bright
terror of shallows, my sister's
beads clicking in the night. I'm
not talking now about memory,
but the way words leap backward
to their beginnings, Wittgenstein's
"significant silences," his desk
drawer of posthumous phrases,
words detached into mystery
on little scraps of blue paper.
So the clear argument of morning
comes on, and lovers rise
from their rented beds to lie
in the sun. In Commercial Street,
one man receives from another
"the signature of God" in his hand.
"What is it?" I ask my wife.
A talisman? A smooth stone?
A word from Hebrew cast in silver?
I lay back on the sand of this
rough prayer of a beach and close

my eyes on the four white ribs
of the sky, listening to the low
roll of surf say “jour,” “jour,”
and sometimes “tousjours” to the shore.

The preceding poems are from *What I Think I Know: New & Selected Poems*, Another CHICAGO Press, 1991.

AT BRIDGET'S WELL

The deep door of the sea
slams shut against the shore;
everything the body knows.
And my wife counts off
the counties—Leitrim, Long-
ford, Roscommon, Galway,
Clare—the way the God-ridden
Irish count off beads.
But she's no fool of wisdom.
Neither Irish, nor Catholic,
nor stunned by centuries
of Virgin-worship or plastic
flasks tipped with waters
of miracle. Pure tourist.
Hard traveller.

That day,
more than fifty years ago,
when my Sister married God,
she gave up all she had.
It wasn't much, I used
to think. But I was wrong.
It was everything. Now,
in these narrow, too-sunlit
lanes thorny with gorse,
bruise-bright with fuchsias,