

what comes out to light

poems by

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And when we clear away
All this debris of day-by-day experience,
What comes out to light, what is there of value
Lasting from day to day?

Louis MacNeice
(from *Autumn Journal*, 1939)

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Here I am, and now.
That's not a definition,
just a vantage point.

Here and now

After

Afterwards
as aftermath grows
out of the aftershock

you try to take stock
with a sideways look
(the sides being
outside,
inside).

And it's hard to decide
what was key, what was lock,
what caused, what ensued
from, the downward slide
with its varying shapes -
sometimes a cascade
where it all comes unhooked,
sometimes a slower
downwards glide,
or the lesser uncontrol
of a downwards ride.

And once it's all levelled out
at the foot of the fall
with, say, the sea and the shore
and a moment that's still,

it seems some succeed
once they've slid and slipped
with what you've only tried -
they seem better equipped

to take things in their stride.
From where you stand, too,
it seems luck seeks them out:
horses come to their hand
in their moment of need
boats wash up on land,
and they find the right track
for a new upwards ride
knowing how reins and saddles work,
or can canoe
against the tide
knowing how waves and paddles work.

Though maybe that's just
what it looks like to you
since for you things impede
(outside, inside,)
the easy bounce-back:
the gaps are too wide
for spectacular leaps
your backbone's just normal
your muscles are slack
your eyesight's a limit
that keeps you in check.

The only way back
or up or through
for you is to walk;
thinking, as you place one foot after
the other, how so much that we learn
must be self-taught
and come with the taut, dry
aftertaste that resides within
the afterthought.

Admiring her I asked

Admiring her sure-footedness I asked if she could take me
through how she did it, how she thought,
hoping that could make me

I don't know, less erodable, better able to cope.
"Well", she said, "one thing: I have no set of strictures
that can forsake me
as if I had been clinging to a non-existent rope
twisted of values wanting me to worry
if they love or hate me,

a rope which can be snapped, can drop me. And while I
know
it happens, I try to ducks-back it
when other people conflate me

with pre-conceived pictures, memories, their own version
of me, their slants on life. Their problem if they under-rate
or overestimate me.

But if this sounds like I see in life a quest, as though
I had a heroic notion of myself as a beacon of unblur-
ability, then you mistake me.

All that talk of buddhistic balance, of constant composure?
No:
love, passion, embroiling human commitment - these I
welcome
when they shake me.

All these pulsing things - let them tell you they're the nub,
the centre

round which it all spins. Let them pull and push you, lung-
pump your blood,
don't think, 'They might mis-shape me.'

Maybe it's like surfing - keeping my joints responsive in the
rush and noise
of the wave, living the elementals, knowing that life
sometimes will be calm me, sometimes spate me."

She made it sound, not easy, but as if nothing could dent
her,
and she could always be in that engaged and generous, yet
unperforably sovereign state. Me,

I feel it's beyond me, her mix of flame and edge and poise,
but can I learn to be less perturbable, so things don't
undermine
or overtake me

quite as much? "One thing I think you shouldn't do",
she said, "is feel you need to dodge or ignore the ferment,
fashion an escape. Me,

I say this: for all that life, events, other people too,
are sure to pummel and pressure me, seek to trip or grab
me, try to sliver or deflate me,
knock me down and on their terms re-instate me,

it's not for anyone to think they can chalk up my tab,
plus here, minus there. Whose tab is it? Who is named
at the foot of the slate? Me."

Mist

Mist,
subsume me,
lift, diffuse me;
drift and loosen me;
make me mist.

This:
hard edges held
in abeyance,
their dominance repealed,
over-self-reliance
down-scaled.
Not corporeal, yet
in and of this

world;
not colliding
with it, not dissolving
or exactly over-riding
it, but lacing
through, between, among
the world.

Not
rebuking the non-quiet:
rather, stilling it;
you don't assert
so much as demonstrate
the quieter way
that is not