

THE BURNING DECK

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The window of my bedroom overlooked the roofs:
squares, diagonals, receding blocks, terra cotta, twilight colours,
tiled, oblong shapes, Chagall, all tangled to
the London River (beyond, the Essex marshes). No ships tonight.

You know how it is in a dream when the sky is vast
but intimate things are closer. I could see
and smell and taste and feel on my ankles
and legs, the turbulent black water (diesel, oil and tar), the

currents moving, stronger
than alcohol or memory or muscle, the white froth
crashed up, waves spume crying
under the pier by the pilot station -

all from the floor of my bedroom, looking through
that window, as the waters broke
on the shingle and the stones
knocked into each other, again, against, again -

and the black, black sky suddenly lit up
like fireworks, nuclear night: red, yellow, white upon white
trails of stars in flaring forms
blossom-bursts of light, later than midnight, incandescence -

bursting and failing and fading and bursting
and blazing and trailing, all through the frame
of my childhood's bedroom window, my feet on the carpeted floor:
No dream tonight, no softness in the memory. This, the burning deck.

THE RIVERS OF SPACE

For Wilson Harris

Why do we turn ourselves away, like this, from sunlight into dark, divining rock? The fissures in the mountains take us, allow us into themselves, but there is no easy air, meandering in dances like a greensward pastoral, or turning corners broadly and in leisure, as a man might walk in Jonson's Penshurst. Not for these and not for us: a thrawnness insists upon acceptance of a range that can't be chosen easily.

- A haggard face with hollow eyes,
an arm set leaning, firmly, on a fence: and in behind, a field, a cottage,
comfort - a wife and child, the give and take,
dogs and teapots, china, cutlery, pleasantries that keep
alive and cover up the sheer urge of meaning leaning within. No
comfort in that, except in turning from it, and often little grace,
back to that home, that hearth. And then to find that urgency
alive as well in others, men and women, wife and child,
flashing in an adamant glance,
so rare it is, so common.

- You're smiling as we look at the child, and he is
smiling back at you. You comment on the wisdom in
the smile; it seems to come from a distant place in time.
I'm thinking of my father and his father's name that stretches back.
The hardest thing of all is to say what it means as simply and
as clearly as it can be said, and it's simply that we know
it can't be said at all in any other way. And that's
why we turn ourselves away, like this, from easy
dancing afternoons, from sunlight, into cavernous divining rock:
whole theatres of sound with rivers and with music, running and
cascading in them: falling through air, the rivers of space.

WITHIN SPAR CAVE

Here there is this deeper pull. The water running over stone is threshold, strange, revoking you, linking this organic thing to inorganic pasts. This limestone shows in structured state the life no longer found. Silurian is ages gone. That link's contained in me. 'The original unit survives in the salt' breeze blowing now a world away, within Spar Cave.

I wish it could be clear, as easily as I lean down, push my hand down, through sheets of running water, touch and hold the quilted limestone, see and sense the water up to my wrist, a bangle of ice: water made solid, petrified flesh, frozen desire, a primal transformation in the zones that lie inside us and the cave there, in the stone.

'If it was love we felt, would it not keep, travel where we travelled?' Carry it with you forever. I speak with your voice.