

Memory Cards: Ashbery Series

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for John Emil Vincent

Of the goggles of memory: The moment of awakening that is also one of falling into a less than conscious suspension, suspecting a hiatus in the syntax morning brings to bear on evening's more unquiet agitations. The egrets on the fresh-mown lawn look like pieces on a child's chess board, not quite in their place, yet not too far from it. That memory is a binding means either that it covers our wound or that it closes the book on us. My mother cannot remember to hold the phone to her ear, nor to put more than breath in her voice. I speak to a room I remember (television, stock photos, couches) and feel my voice sink in the plush. There must be an antechamber of such. Voice is old woman slumped in a chair, elbow too weak to rest on its arm. Here is mine, through acres of air.

--27 December 2010

Or didja really think I was somebody else? Someone writes he's not real, our president. The glass half-full is empty. It's partly cloudy today, flash flooding expected. The egrets are like clouds with legs on the lawn and you can't get into the Black Caucus unless your skin is. Radhika was Japanese before she was African American, which makes her more like her white mother than you might think. Where late the sweet birds. Mornings bring the true twitter feed. The senator gave him back his ring when he got the right to tell. They seem to fall out of the gray sky's skin against green mountains. Eating bugs is ordinary, but watching it happen is not. Show is for shower, the one you'll share. Verbs are time's skin, its stretch marks indices that something happened; we don't know yet what it was, but if you stick around long enough, we'll be sure to tell ya.

--28 December 2010

For it is you I am parodying, though not through simple reversals, like replacing “dying” with “living” or “paradis” with “enfer.” What you infer from my intrusion is your business alone; we are a private people, after all, locked up in our mansions without furniture, gazing out at the next one over, wondering what lawn service the neighbors use. In my dream, the street directions ended with OM, as if home were nothing more than a sound to summon up an empty lot. The next soccer parent over was placing bets on college games, told me last week didn't go so well. Bookies read the leaves, while we are left with the chicken scratch of print. I open you at random, snitch a line, fear an injustice has inevitably been done. She stole money from the school, then walked away with probation. At least she paid them back.

--30 December 2010

You private person. You less than public creature of the crowd, isolated speck in being's penumbra, eyeball in a field, you! Listen here, the voice of your audience awakens you to the absence of your mother/lover/pet, where only Echo lasts, having long since divorced Narcissus, who blossoms glumly in the sagebrush behind the stage. Scared of the clock, he *spilled the banana*. Numbers kept adding up, red dots splashing on the iPod Touch: *I gilled him!* What is touch, when wound is absence modified, when angry birds come calling, but only from inside a lit box? The island is covered by absences, notes scribbled on light poles, torch ginger tied to bus stops, phantom launching pads, a scar on the concrete barrier. Your multiple-choice test begins now, and your score determines what future resides where the horizon would be were it not for the crenelated mountains, even as you stand locked to a past you cannot see but only dig in, like a politician planting a tree that denotes settlement, not shifts of key. The cello sounded flat, she said with some sharpness in her voice, having attended sarcasm boot camp years ago. But the cello responded: come closer, you ain't heard nothing yet.

“*There are no trade winds. The ocean too / Is someone's idea.*” Or we are its, without apostrophe, boogie boarders of no particular lodging except what's swell. And then kaput upon the shore where one who sings is a stilt, and our stilted voices cannot locate their key. Time grows less linear with each day's passing, like a forward to her fullback, fullback to her goal keeper. Return, refrain, repeat. *How does he avoid romanticizing it?* No one loves nature so much as a man with a gun who rhapsodizes. The white man's blues are something else; in this economy we hire you to invent more categories, then to break them like an ugly mug. The valley was a trough last night, air the excretion of sparkler and popper, firecracker and concussion bomb. We awaken to a new forest of signs, reminding us to turn off the stove, flush the toilet, eat our peas. Suss out the vowels and align them well. There's a form to be filled in, verse to be made while there's sunshine.

--1 January 2011

Some say that the measuring of time / Is a recognition of what it is but what it is in the present tense. Time so often locates itself elsewhere, or we put it somewhere and forget it, as if it were a cell phone. You try calling it, but the battery's dead, or it's in the trunk, or you don't really want to find it anyway, especially not those text messages you never look at because they're not in real English. I call my mother and she says I look forward to it but she won't remember saying that five minutes from now. Have we passed it yet, this trying to make sense of it, an on-ramp closed because the president drives by on the way to a future-directed activity, like golf? A hole in one makes no sense in Fragment Land. It's a planned community, after all, with a lake, several recreation areas, and a row of churches. Rumors of a tragic history seep into the culverts, but the drainage is good, housing prices stable, and tomorrow you'll get the garage door fixed.

--2 January 2011

*A breeze like the turning of a page / Brings back your face, as if leaf preceded breeze, your face the bringing back to a window that rattles not from the wind but from a tremor. Earth's palsy cured the rotten chimney by depositing its recyclables on the lawn. His hand shook as he paid the bill; hers quivers when she demands to leave. There are no taxis here, no yellow cabs, no limos, no vans, no shuttles, no bikes, no vehicles to what we call your metaphor. *What am I doing here? I live here? Thank you.* It's your home in noun only. There's no name for what we have done, for we have not committed or exiled you. We pay the bills each month, after all, and they're considerable. If forgetting transcends all this, then you have not yet made the flight; you're delayed on the tarmac while snow falls and de-icing trucks hover like curious elephants over cold wings. They are your mourners, these sad robotic clowns, until such hour as the plane ascends to the choppy air of what? Insight? Excess? The halfway to Hawai'i game? Term limits begin at that seam in the clouds; you can't again be elected most likely to remember your past, or anyone else's. *To retire* means so many things.*

--19 January 2011

But just as children imagine a prayer ascends like a FedEx package into the cloud where an old guy sits, so I conceive of this day as one box upon many. The container ship fills, until middle age calls out your disorganization; which box was that memory in, or that one? There is one memory you must feed or it will burst, fester, attract flies. What this memory is cannot be found in the rolodex, or even the google doc that sits inside your box-like head. There are no wrappings to make it desirable to children, so you look for other hints—dents, a scrawled word, a furtive meow from within. That all your memories will be delivered on one particular day offers no consolation. In not-seeing danger lies. You need to see it open like a flower, or a tide. Get out the Leatherman and start unscrewing; only one screw will be loose, the others hard as nails. At least it got delivered.

--21 January 2011

This past is sampled and is again / The right one, the one they choose for you at amazon.com, given your history of commodity fetishism. What's at stake is the promise of a reading at the table outside an herbal store in Chinatown. In dementia, anything can be foretold, especially the past, its peculiar junctures, intersections, the lights flashing orange—is there any other level of alert?--a siren in the near distance. If you know the word for your home, you still cannot find it. It's a mansion with no lawn, no jockey by the driveway, exoskeleton to no insect you can see, both truth and a facade. What remains is husk; there are vats of it in the markets, promising a cure to the disease that sits atop your tongue, but cannot say its name. Mute Hamlet still can't make up his mind, like a bed or a fairy tale. But now you can talk back. There's an app for it.

--21 January 2011

In a far recess of summer includes a word on this week's spelling test. Its focus is on words like "spelling," whose syllables (as in "syllable") split the difference (as in "difference") between repeated consonants. So why "recess," with its couplet at the end, its singular "c" between two "e's"? As the word that cannot fit, it fits, retreating to extremities, more difficult to spell because it fails the lists logic. "It's in her genes," the soccer moms agree, but that pool is as broken as hers who "eats a tuna sandwich without assistance." *So far is goodness a mere memory / Or naming*, but there's nothing mere about being, except in French. The name we gave her was hers already.

--24 January 2011

Each of these memory cards begins from a sentence or a phrase from John Ashbery's collected poetry, Library of America edition.

The memory card form: each prose poem must fit on a card. You can also read *Memory Cards & Adoption Papers* (Potes & Poets, 2001). The Wolsak Series was published by Ink in Metz, France in 2010.

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