Ledyard: The Exhaustion of Sheer Distance

Edward Dorn

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The Invaders

The birches slash at the shadow
with the pure white of joy;
the dark fir pour upward
to stain the mountain.

Out of the rocks come shouting,
immense, hospitable people,
hands like slabs of laughter,
hearts as gentle as moss.

To right and left they shower
all the coin in the world;
it lies like slag in the foothills,
like lustreless ash.

Up icy streams they stride,
breaking trout in their fists,
bugling to thrush and sparrow:
"No money! Not ever again!"

And out of the village doorways,
drunken and blazing with mirth,
shining like metal with glory,
the people pour to greet them,

no purse, no past, no guile;
only an open tumbling
caught and buried in bigness illimitable.

—George Abbe

Ledyard: The Exhaustion of Sheer Distance

"I give up. I give up"—John Ledyard.

Around the

Horn

the jealousy
of location was the same
sheerness as the marking.

with Cooke, in the swell
of the summer tides, all the trickery
one could ask for, of onslaught
one could ask for nothing more
and of course, the journals
were suppressed, though all marked
was the tenor of the passing earth,
On the ghastly coast, indolent Spaniards thought Mary could possess by flags, the squatter's occupation had not yet come. Still the dreamy hurrying, Vitus Behring, and the trip back to Petersburg for fresh supplies, to be yoked by scientists, those curious argumentative people who took seven years returning to Kamchatka, one way. Meanwhile the blood of the Aleuts ran in Norton Sound, and Ledyard regardless of the date left for Europe.

Where Jefferson said in Paris and Jones agreed, "Go to Kamchatka and thence across," and Ledyard went although not a one of them had any money because due to some complicated unfixing sojourners could travel broke, tramping as he did from Stockholm to Petersburg around the Sea of Bothnia, but they don't say he stopped in taverns or what condition his shoes, the point of destination was the Pacific coast of Russia. This was a way to get to the other side of America. And that must have been no irony then. Walking is what I associate with Ledyard, distance as sheer urge, not satellite and its utilitarianism.

A wild, thousand mile walk in the cold to Petersburg, thence to Barnaul, midway with Dr. William Brown. People were everywhere then looking at flowers, exhibitions came long after there was no place to go.

Where, when he got to Yakutsk and met an old mate who had been also with Cooke he went to Irkutsk where Catherine's cossacks jogged up redfaced and seized him in in a confusion of towns named Yakutsk and Irkutsk and carried him on a horse six thousand miles back where they set him down just inside the Polish border, from where probably he walked at least part of the way back to London, which is where, he said I Give Up.

But what I wonder at times, being only from Illinois is did you count the stretching corridors of spruce on that trek coming back as we used to count telephone poles going home from my aunt's on an endless rainy Sunday afternoon, where shortly after the beginning of an american siberia, but the mystery: when did our Poland occur?

Like your spirit and bones to dust then set out for the African Society to discover the sources of the Nile a mad Mark Anthony the legions of the weather of the earth at your back and on the way out, fell.

Mystic sheer distance was in thine eye, that beautiful abstract reckoning, the feet, walking: for no other reason the world.

—Edward Dorn