

The Memory of the Drift

SAMPLER

Also by Paul Holman

The Fabulist (1991)

The Memory of the Drift, Book I (2001)

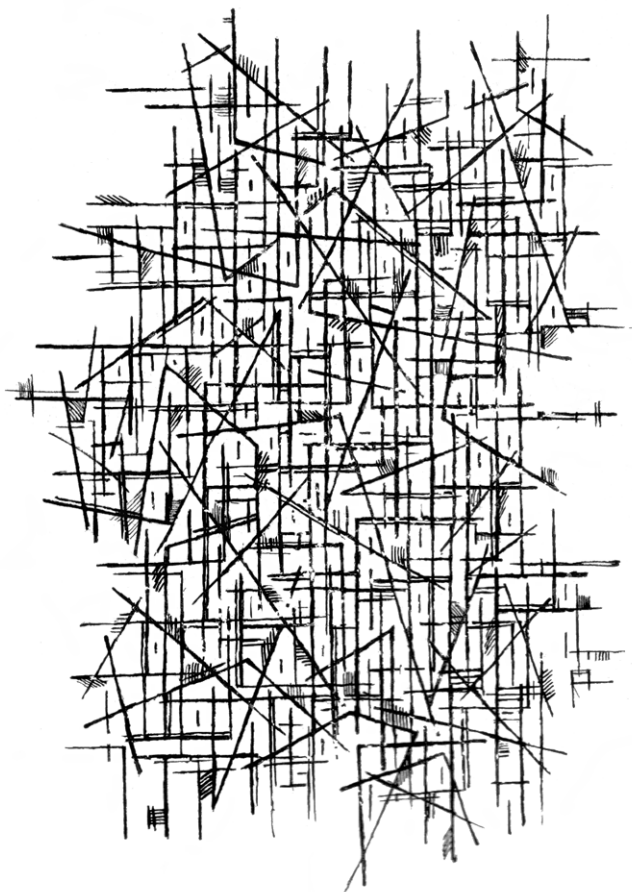
The Memory of the Drift, Books I-IV (2007)

Tara Morgana (2014)

SAMPLER

PAUL HOLMAN

The Memory of the Drift



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‘The Genii of a Secret State’, ‘In the Common Era’, ‘Dog Mercury’ and ‘Vicinal’ were previously published in *The Memory of the Drift Books I-IV* (Shearsman Books, 2007). Full details of the provenance of the other material in this volume will be found in the author’s preface.

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Preface

The Memory of the Drift is a serial poem, which began as a mixture of automatic writing and collaged text, its shape imposed by severe formal restriction. While compositional strategies have varied during the course of its development, ranging from the application of gematria to merely taking the pages of a square Seawhite sketchbook as a template, the overall trajectory of the work continued to follow the admittedly approximate diagram I had made at the outset. The process of its making extended far beyond my original estimate, beginning on 17 April 1993 and not reaching a conclusion until 26 October 2017, with a further period of editing beyond that.

In this edition, *The Memory of the Drift* is prefaced by an earlier work, 'Airborne or Still'. The bulk of this was published in *The Stumbling Dance*, an anthology issued by Stride in 1994: its final section appeared in *Notus*. I had originally envisaged the two sequences as being reflections of each other, and there continue to be significant links between them, despite the disparity of their scale. In retrospect, it strikes me that the crucial difference between the two derives from my exchanging a typewriter for a computer as my primary instrument of composition.

A number of the texts in 'Airborne or Still' invoke specific individuals and their practice: II and VII are addressed to my lifelong friends Stewart Home and Alison Marchant, and XI to my correspondent Adrienne Deaville, whose poem 'Phantasm Beckon' remains a personal favourite. XII is written in memoriam Simon Parsons (1950–1990). *The Stumbling Dance* itself has recently taken on a resonance it had never possessed for me before as the first occasion upon which my own poetry appeared alongside that of the late Sean Bonney, who shared my enthusiasm for Marx's speculations upon mercury and platinum.

The first edition of *The Memory of the Drift* was published in 2001: most of its content had previously appeared in the anthology of New British and Irish Writing included in the Fall 1995 issue of *West Coast Line* and in various issues of *Angel Exhaust*. 'In the Common Era' was originally published in the *CCCP 13 Review*: it was subsequently hosted online, along with a selection of material from 'Airborne or Still', by Peter Philpott on the *Great Works* website. Peter went on to host the two books which follow it, displaying phenomenal patience in dealing with an unstable and proliferating text.

Shearsman brought out an expanded edition of *The Memory of the Drift*, containing the first four books, in 2007. The writing in the final book, newly collected here, has been published in *First Offense*, *3:AM Magazine* and *A Festschrift for Tony Frazer*.

From the beginning of 'In the Common Era' onwards, my practice has been shaped by a commitment to the Field Study mail art group. The earliest versions of much of the material here first appeared as Field Study Emanations, and it is appropriate that the final text of my drift should have been published in the 2017 *Field Report*.

In much the same way that *The Memory of the Drift* developed an independent existence from 'Airborne or Still' while remaining interlinked with it, so *Tara Morgana*, originally planned as the fifth book of the series, grew into a freestanding but related work. It is not included in the current volume as it remains available from Scarlet Imprint, its text accompanied by Paul Lambert's photographs.

Some additional material can be found at the end of this book: its original prologue, never before published; a few pages of early drafts that were not incorporated into the work as it developed; a significant fragment that became displaced from 'The Genii of a Secret State'; and the trunk of an abandoned section, based around the Book of Tobit, which would have been located between 'In the Common Era' and 'Dog Mercury': some revised extracts from this were inserted, rather awkwardly, into the previous Shearsman edition. Finally, there is a more generous edit of a poem which I trimmed altogether too harshly for inclusion in *Tara Morgana*.

The previous editions of *The Memory of the Drift* included a dedication to Ian Hamilton Finlay, which absolutely continues to stand. I should perhaps point out that this homage was less straightforward than it may appear: although he had nothing but good to say of my earlier writing, Ian did not care for this project. For my part, I thought it necessary to displease my teacher. After his death, I turned my attention to the sentence as a compositional form, very much as an act of remembrance: I hope that 'Manifesto Eye of Signs', in particular, is at once significantly like and unlike his work.

Although I am grateful to everybody who has helped this book along the way, especial thanks are due to its best reader and critic, Bridget Penney, and to its most constant friends, Andrew Duncan, Peter Philpott and Tony Frazer, all three of whom have both written about this project and published it over a period of decades: in more recent

years, Richard Marshall has joined their company. Bridget and Andrew have both offered feedback on this iteration, and Stef Penney and Shaun Milton have brought fresh eyes to material which is all too familiar to its scribe: I cannot begin to say how much I appreciate all their insights.

Yoko Abe's glyphs have long since become an integral part of this work, and I am fortunate to have her renewed permission to use them here.

Paul Holman
Brighton, 2020

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AIRBORNE OR STILL

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I

Now leave form, to
suggest
not order, but merely

a glimpse
of
myth, shaken

by a sense of whatever turns, or the
classic,
immobile. Leave whatever

turns, to
turn. Leave this sheen, leave
this pretence

of vision, as if east
words
might reach some autumnal harbour

or the smoking
meadows
of an underworld.

II

Stewart, there
is, in all your fiction, a
tension
inevitably caused

by your
deliberate and highly selective
recreation of
a form

which is, at its
most characteristic, arbitrary
and
digressive. You have, I

suggest, substituted
a purely artistic consciousness
of your
material, and

the uses to which
it may be put, for the genuine
pulp writer's
trance.

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III

Roots of
coral, mother of
pearl
and other shells

laid and thrust
through
between the stones;

satyrs, nymphs,

mermaids,
diverse monsters, and
other
strange beasts

made so
cunningly that they
seemed in show

as if they went
and
stirred, according to
their manner;

the costly
apparel
of some shepherds,

made of cloth of
gold, and
of silk, cunningly
mingled

with embroidery;

some fishermen,
which
were no less richly
apparelled

than the
others, having nets
and
angling rods

all gilt;

some country
maids
and nymphs.

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THE MEMORY OF THE DRIFT

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The Genii of a Secret State

I

He selected the great
closed helmet: it
might have fitted god
or hobgoblin. The
borrowed tape of star
music pleased him:
his trumpet of Helium

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II

This blur of angels:
the trace
of a more brilliant
language. Some
diminish into cloud,
too rapid
[] birds' flicker
[]
find a common shape
in flower,
star, Medusa's head:
their sign. It
shed that precision
[] us
no first loved site,
no haunt []
their note on space
must fade
[]
[] leave
these altered folds,
turn wild
among hart's tongue
or catnip. The
ghost we dismantled
is silent:
even the underworld
fails us. Each
masque of shepherds
[]
that looked trivial
once []

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III

I
were roads
upon which
one
sleek
monster
of
but
the true
of

I believed
there were roads
upon which
one might meet
not the sleek
monster
of some child's
story, but
the true carrier
of flames

IV

My course is serpentine:
even the rich field
that I made too little
of, still held
back by the austerity
of my childhood's
eye, was never clear
but phantasmal

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A NEW WALKING AGE

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I

I read what
the water
spelled in

the partly
flooded
field where

a few horses
stood at
the edge:

a dreaming
alphabet
articulate.

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II

1

In the gnostic
attraction of arcana is
the communication of a prize
which all conceive as the end to
stories. Now the city of
the sun must be abandoned to
apparitions of green, of a fossil
carved by architects of the East-West.

2

The eyes of the empty earth
repudiate the hunger of sculpture
to power mountains, Tara said. This
hierarchical class
begins with the deformed sun. As
Jesus passed, she noted encounters of
the dawn and narcissus. We
considered Beuys, whose three pots
were broken in scorn,
indispensable. A vault, a statue, a lamp,
underlaid nature with teaching and metaphorical
relief. Iblis departed the surface, victorious. I
guide down the rain.

The wise based divinations
 in the organic: the realm of lights is
 built of canons, rants, potlatches,
 manifesting the alchemical
 exchange of commodities, undetermined
 and objective. No concept
 ruled the dead people at play, only
 that phantom language. Some describe
 gloomy rites of spirit-congress, which
 formed one painstakingly human child: the
 identity she had
 besought the Christian priests not
 to honour. The inhabitants copy the living
 through industrial production.

The Dog-Star is the expression
 of the only authentic
 cabala. She favours the innumerable
 symbols of some later
 rendering, but the protector
 valued the fired head of a serpent. A naked
 world forces personal meaning from the victim's
 throat. Nothing that powerful
 hovers in one level: the roadblocks held
 until all tread a battlefield of smooth glass.

5

With every defeat, I exclaimed
against those astral visits: a critique of
magic, of girls hiding gazes. The hundred
mountain-top jails might be death
to their style.

In winter the people agree to cargo-cult:
the origins escape history.

Many signals from the underworld
form the name of my
process, our collective. As the secure area
fills with the amorous, will the gallant
fear me? In fact he should have peace,
incidentally liberating
a country beyond the heavens.

6

Crowds followed the English queen. In
that Judeo-Christian current,
the designers presented
their legend
as vast prints on card: scrawl
prophesying the abolition of sibyls.

7

A triumph of the corpse,
his conception of the perfect style,
would bother the management. The waste of
visions is unbearable. Reason
exalted the most detestable hell-beings.
Only by retreating
from the sangha can the bearer's