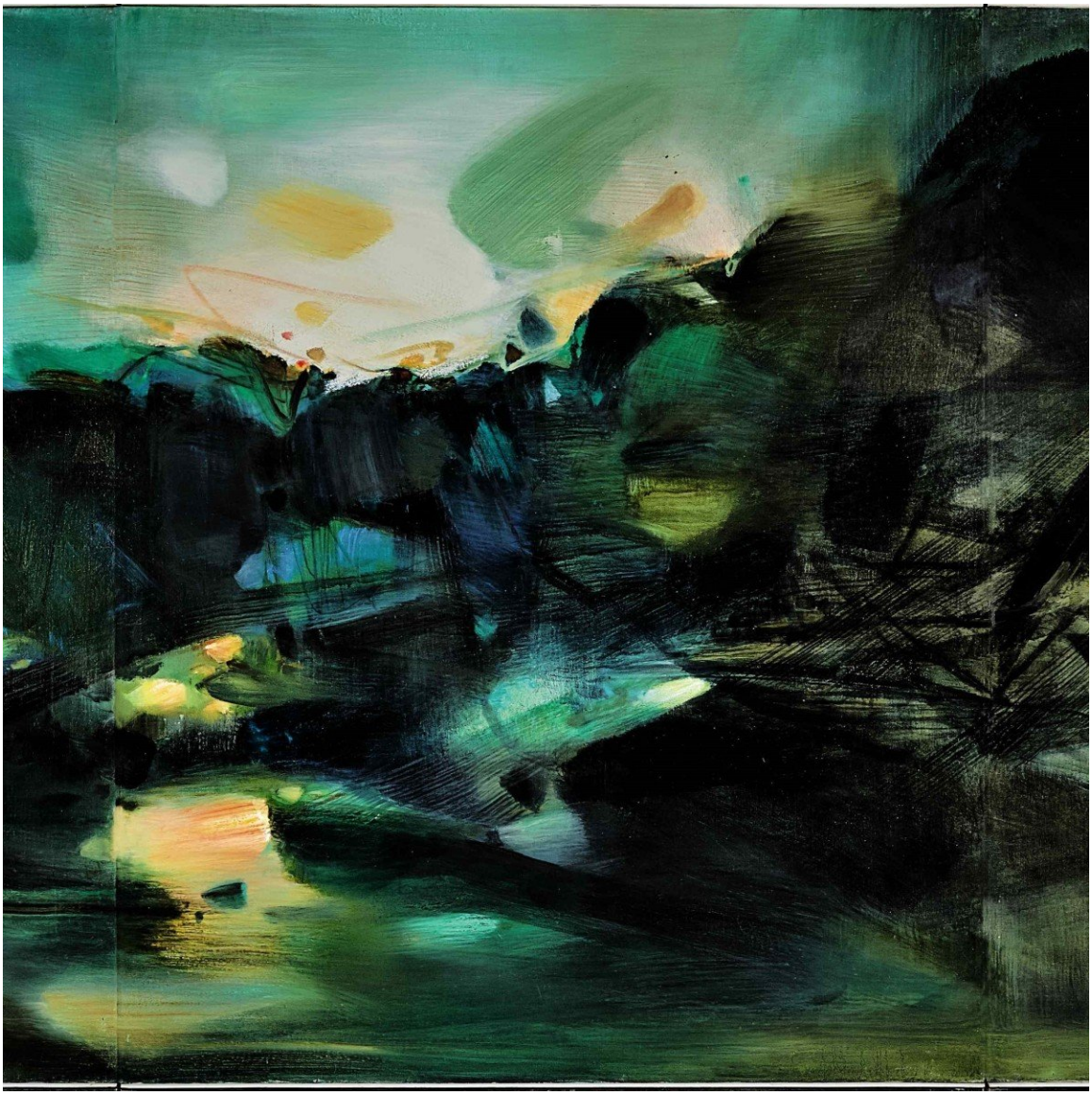
Three Poems

by David Solway (April 2021)



Les éléments confédérés (detail), Chu Teh-Chun, 1983-4

Spirit

Exists
like a lost grace note in a whisper of melody
you haven’t listened to.
Or a sibilance in the wind merely guessed at.

Or even in the mode of silence:
a tree falls whether it is heard or not.
Even if it is not seen
it pulls like gravity
or deepens like a basin in space.
You cannot touch it.
It has neither odour nor fragrance.
It has neither taste nor aftertaste.
It is darker than dark matter.
Beware of spirit.
It is both a marvelous thing
and a terrifying thing.
Marvelous because this means
the world is more than the sum of its atoms
and terrifying because this means
your suffering may be endless.



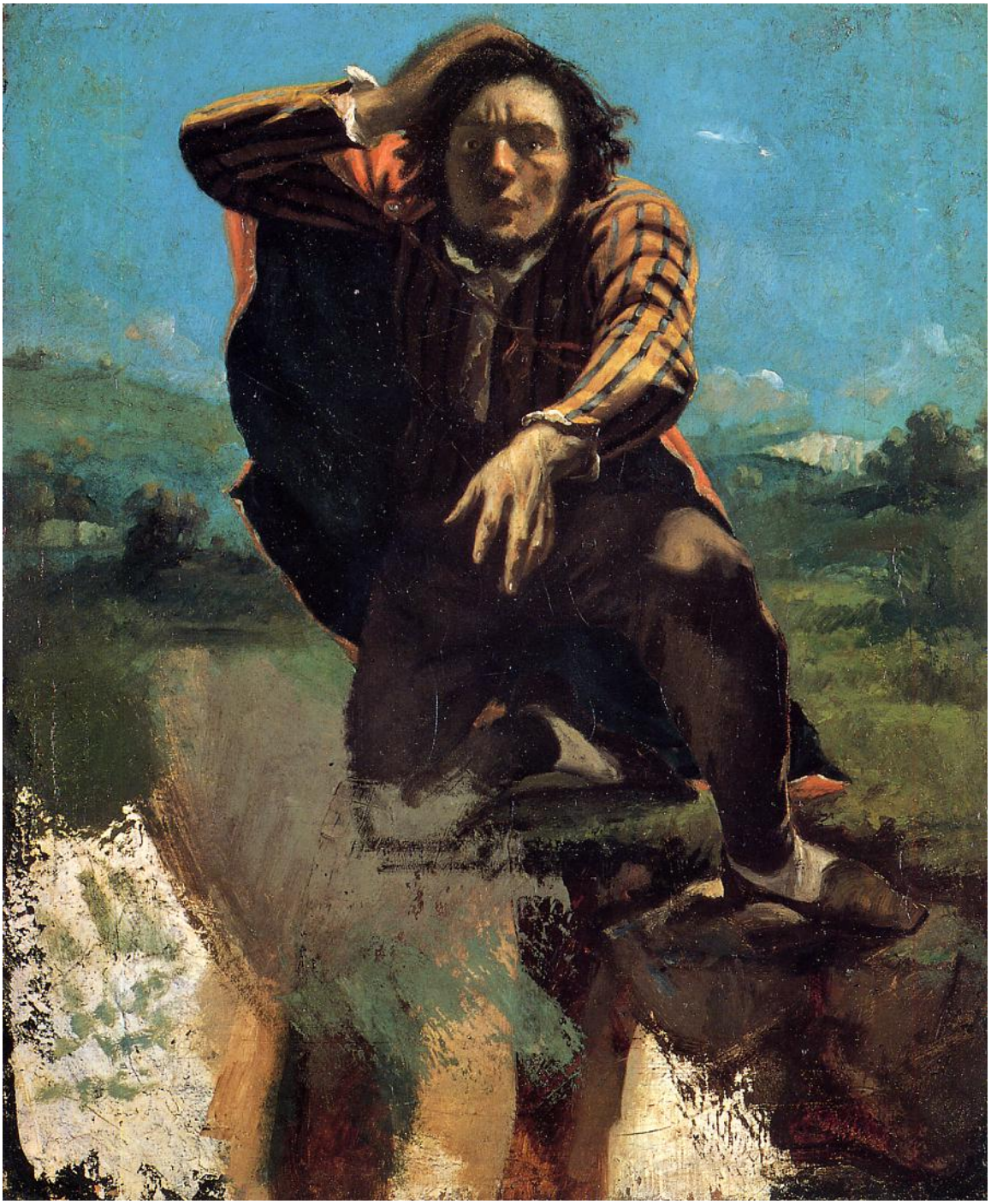
Monk by the Sea, Caspar David Friedrich, 1808-10

Monk and Drifter

The isle is called *Aghia Kyriaki*, Saint Sunday,
a burning coal the sea cannot extinguish,
fed by a remorseless sun, yet sporadic and cold

as a blood moon in the brackish heavens.
A solitary monk shuffles in meditative isolation,
living on berries and rainwater and the Greek scriptures,
foraging for juniper and scattering psalms
like seed on scrabble ground,
knowing it comes to this.

On barren Amorgos, tattered garment
on a body of water, a drifter
who has seen better days and will see worse,
living on handouts and pension cheques,
stands ankle-deep in the sea, faces the setting sun
and skipping stones like dapping flies
in the reed-racked waters
mutters to himself in tongues,
knowing it comes to this.



The Man Made Mad by Fear, Gustav Courbet, 1844

“Di meliora ferant, nec sint mihi somnia vera…”

O you gods, cut me a little slack,
have pity on me, poor sod that I am
and make these evil dreams I’ve startled from
vanish, these lying prophets—
rip their black tongues out.
Sleep that befriends the sick gives me no peace,
avoids my bed like an unfaithful lover.

Heaven alone sends reliable messages,
reveals the future in coded entrails
the Tuscan haruspex deciphers into fact,
that harbinger of light whose words we can trust.
I crave his lucent shape upon my threshold
as I desire Sleep to slip between my sheets.
But dreams, these bums and vagabonds
of the dark,
these dregs of sewer and ditch,
these quacks and humbugs slick with deception,
muggers of rest, burglars of nest eggs,
abusers of our confidence,
O luminous ones, boot them out of the house,
rid the city of these parasites,
relieve my troubled home and mind,
inspire the augur to pronounce infallibly,
cast salt on the fire, stalks to the ground,
help me distinguish the thief from the watchman.

—from Lygdamus, Elegies, iv

Table of Contents

David Solway's latest book is *Notes from a Derelict Culture*, Black House Publishing, 2019, London. A CD of his original songs, *Partial to Cain*, appeared in 2019.

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