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### Maple Leaf

*At naptime the teacher read stories she let us choose.  
There were two kinds: real life and maple leaf—or at least  
that’s what it sounded like to me when everyone was saying  
“make believe.” And so of course I always chose maple leaf.  
And I still like maple leaf...I mean, as a term for that...  
~Richard Howard, in conversation*

Forgive us, Ezra Pound, for this indulgence—  
looking back. Children still, inclined to weep,  
a springy must of mud, grass, April damp  
returns us to schoolyards and rubber boots,

to waxed hallways reflecting fluorescent lights  
forming moonbeam paths that lead us—surprise!—  
into clammy classrooms. It’s raining out.  
We’ll stay inside and maple leaf: pretend

the raindrops’ forking rivulets along  
the casements are really silver rivers that run  
through cultivated pasts. No, not Cleveland,  
not dreary Ohio, from which we shall flee

as soon as we are able, if not sooner:  
New York, Paris, Houston, er, uh, Utah.  
But, even as we’re moving forward, always  
looking back, having learned that this is what

we do best, and not just that, it’s what’s best  
for us to do, to make believe our way  
back through the root, the bole, the limb, and leaf,  
because the past is infinite, the future,

a drag, too vague to be of any interest,  
the present, only the past not yet set  
down, not yet sifted through, too new, too in-  
substantial to make much of a meal, tawdry

(there, we've said it!), even admitting how  
a cheap thrill sometimes serves well for a snack  
just as on occasion being told to go  
and fuck ourselves is par for the course. Listen,  
(more, with stanza break)

we've heard about *We've heard it all before*.  
It's just that word *all* we're not so sure about.  
*All*. Really? Doubtful, don't you think? We call  
for further exploration and elect

ourselves to office: we'll take it from here,  
and before setting out remind you that  
before all of this now too much for us  
there was once as much of heaven and hell

as there yet is, or isn't it at least  
pretty to think so? We can safely say  
we've learned as much, though admittedly there  
are certain forms of maple leaf with which

we haven't come to terms: sports, jazz, and lace.  
And while we're in confessional mode (fat chance!)  
we'd just as well admit our inability  
to shake the notion that other people do

in fact exist. But be that as it may  
we'd be delighted to corroborate  
what we've unearthed in all our travels and,  
especially perhaps, in *not* traveling:

the world, it turns out, *turns out*, in fact keeps  
turning out long after the paint has dried,  
like the paint roller itself, which, as watching  
a Turkish handyman once revealed to us,

continues flinging specks of color even  
after many revolutions and  
subsequent rinsing-outs. But we digress,  
inside a book-lined apartment near the park,

where, although we prefer to go it alone,  
find the best way to do so is in pairs—  
go figure! Just keep us away from crowds,  
if you don't mind, which might in fact turn us

into the *Fifteenth Way of Looking at*  
a Bleak Bard. And by all means let us see  
the sights, before, you know, they've passed away  
like, say, the Mayan texts we never got  
(more, with stanza break)

the chance to devour, those Catholic flames  
having beat us to it. You want tragedy?  
There it is. Now let's get to work, that is,  
play, because to tell the truth we can't tell

the difference. It's all Greek to us, here,  
now, on this rainy day. Open the book,  
spread the pages wide, and turn them toward  
our faces. We shall maple leaf the rest.