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DREAM TRANSLATION FROM BAUDELAIRE

I will sail no more on that *malheureux*
vaisseau, pirate ship with its leper crew,
scant rigging tangled on masts like vines
that once bore fleshy trumpet flowers till
hard frost, stained wadding from upholstered
coffins whose corpses struggled to break free.
No wake does it carve on its oily ocean,
not one breath of wind does it require—
God save me from the voice of its first-mate
let alone the unseen captain whose howls
all night from his eyeless cabin proclaim
all the language that ship will ever speak—
I hear it even now in my abandoned sleep.

1 November 2010

(Note: I dreamt the first six or so lines of this at around one a.m. after an hour or so of first sleep. Charlotte coughed, headlights coming down Annandale Road found a chink in the curtains, and I kept fiddling with the lines until they woke me fully, and I got up and wrote them down quickly, along with what comes after. The poem's title came with it in the same dream, so I keep it here, understanding (and hoping the reader understands) that it is not a translation of a sonnet by Baudelaire but a poem called "A Translation from Baudelaire," perhaps a translation from whatever the dream-mind understands by the strange sound *baudelaire*. Only as I finished this middle-night transcription did I realize that the poem came on the turn of All Hallows Eve.)

= = = = =

All the dead have gone now.
We are alone
holding the cold
stone of the earth in our hands.

*

The dead have left us.
We are alone.
I hold this
mind in my hand.

*

The dead have left us
alone. Alone
we endure each other.
I am your ancestor
and there is no peace.

1 November 2010

SAMHAIN

Where the two roads
align, life road
and dead road,

for a few hours
we walk together,
not much to tell
us apart

 then
some wind comes out
of the sky and blows us
away from one another

so who are you
walking with me now?

1 November 2010

= = = = =

We come close to the new
then fall back. Money
balks the experiment.
Debases every revelation.
Even the sweet instruction
of our young is spun by it.
Inhibits the rich, strangles
the poor. It kills thinking.

1 November 2010

ALL HALLOWS

and I seem to be mad as a Saturday.
Is it at the dead for leaving us alone?
Or for lingering noisy in our minds?

1 November 2010

= = = = =

When I'm angry

I should stare at a stone
and understand endurance.

When I'm tender

I should stare at a stone
and understand what it means
to preserve identity in silence.

Only when I want to go to sleep
should I look away at birds
springing into the air
because a stone never sleeps.

1 November 2010

= = = = =

In this graveyard
the dead have all the lines.
From the serene eternity
of Vermont granite
they threaten us and promise
they swear they're happy
that they've escaped
this prison I wander through,
a fox looks at me
from the underbrush, I smell
the sweet apology of autumn leaves
smoldering a little
after a little midnight rain.
To my hopeless hopefulness
all these seem to answer
what the stone says.

1 November 2010

= = = = =

Dance moves
for weaving
 a wedding
not in Cana, not in Galilee,
plenty of wine,
no wine at all,
 a woman you know
to a dream of a door
opening on her own,
 her very own.

Was it a riddle of new love?
Dance marries us to what is most our own.

2 November 2010

= = = = =

Need me. Things need me.
Sitting in the cellar room
the coalbin full of books
full of Mahler needs me.

Greek verbs. Suites
cello unaccompanied
I am cello I am alone
one of them for *viola*

pomposa, five strings,
five fingers on my harp,
hand, how can the mind
remember? The cellar

needs me, downstairs
I climb down my body
I come to a place
called the center

and still go down.
How does the brain
remember? The mind
makes things up,

it snows, it doesn't,
sixty years later
Shostakovich violin
concerto still playing,

saying, the mind
is classical, Aelfric
translates Latin
into old English

my eyes hurt,
the sun is always rising,
always, no matter how
far down I go the light

always there before me
and this me to which
the words refer
is not anybody at all

you'd recognize
in a doorway or a mirror
even, me's bones
like with Barbarossa

safe in the mountain
of dream, not even a cat
can get through the door
iron bar on west window

through which no fairy comes
we put iron coronets
around our temples
to keep the wise dark out

those beautiful naked
r clothes in ancient raiment
people who came before
and still are here

to cherish all we have
left of their earth
unhurt, machines
are siegecraft

unavailing finally
against the fairy power,
they keep their distance
they bide our time,

we are inland, they
are ocean, I pull
the wooden walls
close around me

against the wind,
I'm at the bottom
of the stairs at last
or so they let me think.

2 November 2010

=====

A narration concerning the dark life of things
ends always in someone's random hands
reach out to touch another's and the distances are done.

Things end in me. All things end in thee.

2.XI.10

BAUDELAIRE

A figure so large we can't see him
we squat in the gravel before his meager gravestone
fingering the lichened limestone of his words.

And pride ourselves on our so-called songs.
If we think of him at all it is his eccentricities,
cold passions, weird fetishes of perversions.

Never do we chasten ourselves by going
to school to the intricate austerity of his language,
the way he renewed the thingliness of poetry.

3 November 2010

= = = = =

Agency. Stuck in its powers
it contents itself with breathing.
Bulls sound like that in midnight byres.
Bowers. The hue of beast in candlelight,
danger in the arbor. O leafless stars
you pour on me alone. My breath
shapes in front of me as I study the dark.

3 November 2010

= = = = =

When things are larger than themselves
the numbers turn inside out.
Or point in another direction.
Or it starts raining.

Every color happens on cue.
Color is a cue, a clue,
an angel feather fallen
on a shiny translucent world.

Sheen. Schön. When you count them,
things look away.
Things are naturally modest—
that's why counting is so hard.

Everything hides.
And even when you do get the numbers right
you can't get them to stand up and come out.
Things smile in their snug things.

When they dream (and never interrupt
the sleep within a thing) they dream
of the vast spaces of their own interiors.
For things go infinitely in.

For colors remember everything
that ever happened to light anywhere
but each time in its own way—
a human (such as yourself) is pure saturation.

All colors all birds all beasts
all gods but mostly all
numbers resolve in thee.
If you leave the western window open

elves and fairies manipulate your sleep.
And what a waking happens then!
Everything is right! Everything fits!
The road outside is empty in the rain,

no numbers but everything counts,
no dimensions but everything is here,
wet children hurry on their way to school
shout words they don't even try to understand.

But you listen and it tells you everything.

4 November 2010

ALCHIMIA NOVA

Clarify the obvious.

Keep clarifying it

until the obvious

gets so clear

you see right down

to the depths of it

where the murk

confusion putrefies.

Work with that.

It is hidden true

in every obvious.

It's why we are given

eight hours to sleep,

to work the dark stuff

with the skills of dream.

4 November 2010

= = = = =

Waves of no sea
follow me home.

Once the breath was
wide as a gull's wings
that now holds small,
folds close to earth,
says one thing at a time.

Little. Yet over
the quiet clutch of air
you know somebody's
there. No word ever,
ever, with its mouth.

5 November 2010

= = = = =

So it comes down to finding,
reminding,
 walking through the trees.

Until the one
who speaks the stuff you hear
shows up,
 clearing in maple woods, a shape opaque
ringed round with the brightness
of perfectly ordinary human life,
one of your own kind
 somehow speaking to you.

5 November 2010

