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HANDLING SIN

There is a delay
a cortico-thalamic gap
in which the sin
seems to dissolve—
a no-man's-land
and then the fun begins,

the guilt, the grieving,
and grief is the island word for
being conscious at all,
but the pause
between the sin
and consciousness of guilt
is our green paradise,
breathless, on the high moor
a moment, and far
across the sea the coast of France.

2.

I'll tell you how it is with me—
after the thing is done
there is a quiet time.
That's what I'm going on about here,
the empty hour while the soul

**down below (that's where it lives)
takes stock of what's been going on.
Meantime light-headed, almost happy,
but not too confident in this felicity
the sinner idles on the common path.**

3

**There are no confessional boxes in that church.
Just sandbags piled on sandbags
full of guilt, remorse, bewilderment
piled high against the hurricane to come.
The brain. Strange bastion. But of what?**

13 April 2013

=====

**Out of breath or out of meat,
wheat, will, sympathy or luck
but never words, the long mercy
of a narrow lawn, a *morgen*
some old tongues call it,
a little more than half an acre,
green after two days rain, a morning.**

13 April 2013

=====

**Plummy details of the academic life
Cleopatra rolled up in a carpet
movies no one ever gets to see again
and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* I read
all one afternoon like a teenage boy
on a skateboard grinding the sidewalk away.**

13 April 2013

AMONG THE BASSOON

for David Adam Nagy

Flügel, grand piano
piano with a wing
uplifted,
 shadow of the raised top
on the conservatory wall—
gnomon of the sundial
cast by the low-slung light
dramatic lighting
 and the bassoon.

2.
Bach first. Prelude
to everything
else,
 he
is our B.C., the primal one,
the tone
 cast on all time to come
the shadow
of the bassoon rises and falls.

**This instrument
always sounds wrong,
comes from outside music
from a land of being,
of suffering and running away
and coming home,**

wrong

**by its nature, the way nature
is wrong too,
as if a beast had to die
in pain to breathe such sounds,**

**but that's only natural,
nature's like that,**

sings

truest as it goes.

Goes away.

Shadows

dimming into the dark.

Cherry blossoms

falling in the prime.

3.

**Or on our little island
there is a single solitary tree
in the graveyard,**

a paulownia

or princess tree,
its flowers come before the leaves
and when those fragrant purple blossoms fall
they leave seed capsules behind,
pointed ovals,
 hollow, cracking open, hard,
hollow as wood, hollow as the sound of the bassoon.

4.

He transposes what Beethoven
heard (or wanted to hear)
on the cello for the bassoon.
A rounded box with strings
becomes a man with breath
pouting into a hollow tube
though quivering reeds.

American day *aj*, day of the reed,
tube, rushes, human spine
up which all the emssages pass
or sing, trying to reach the mother brain
so far below the music.

5.

Seize the moment
the music doesn't last,
the pretty girl is pretty

for a minute
then the tide comes in
goes out again and the house
is empty, sea-birds
noisy on the cliffs,
if you're lucky there's
still a wind for you to hear.

6.

The look on our faces
is to be heard.
Listeners are performers too.
Eyes open in the light
receiving light, the ears
too are ridden by some
sorrow that comes before
anything we ever knew
to make us sad,
 a requiem
built into the nature of the world,

a mortal sorrow
before anyone ever died,
like that village
the Buddha sent the mother to
to find her dead child.

7.

**All the bodies with their breaths and fingers
all together now understanding out loud,
make us be the animal we pretend to be,
human love human fear human history
and weare really nothing at all but
bright joyous spirit playing brief on a field of ash**

13 April 2013

CRYING

**Crying to reprove the world
the way a child cries
because a child knows
the way things are
is not the right way,**

**the child knows better,
the cry of a child
is the Tao, the cry
is Buddha Nature crying out
from the bloody tissue of how things seem.**

2.

**I dreamt a child was crying—
after a difficult task accomplished,
challenging, well carried out,
now carrying something from it
home to his father stands there
waiting, the child stumbles
and falls, starts crying his eyes out,
relief, exhaustion, safe to last, to say
the way things are is not the way things really are.**

3.

**Crying his eyes out—
to cry the world right
deny the easy etes,
the cozy senses
that claim authority
over his young being,**

**he is a being intact
already knowing something
in himself that the world
as-is will never tell him,
never confirm, always
makehim doubt. But now
the truth is out,
the child is crying,
the sun is coming out.**

14 April 2013

====

**He lost his shoe along the trail
oak leaves stuck between his toes
hasn't shaved for three-plus days—
who is this soul who hobbles into camp?**

**The enduring stuff is rock and moss,
house wall and hammer,
a man's gun
is just another kind of dog.**

**A crescent moon tonight
will reveal nothing we don't already guess.
He is a stranger alas, he is us.**

15 April 2013

=====

**Poems have few words
because you have to read them slow
a lampshade for example
in the living room of a house
you walk past but the light's not on.**

15 April 2013

=====

**Sweet sarcasm of the middle class
if I can do just one thing right
a ship sails up the Seine
as far as Alexander's bridge
where some pigeons are waiting for it
with a human soul breathless in their beaks.**

15 April 2013

=====

**But I loved you love
made me do it
the tower the torn envelope
the shattered flower pot
the hand where no hand should be—
not a touch, not on skin,
in the air, waving, waving,
where goodbye is the same as hello.**

15 April 2013

=====

**He heard a tone a sound a note.
Note, tone? At waking heard
or it woke him.**

**Went downstairs
his son's keyboard, figured out
how to turn it on, pressed down
keys in different octaves till
he found at last one note. Tone.
G below middle C.**

**He played it
again. he called it playing now
and again. Held his index
finger on the key the sound endured.
Why does it last so long.**

**If
he lets it go will he climb back up
and be asleep again?
Is that how sound is supposed to work?**

16 April 2013

TRANSSUBSTANTIATION

**The humble other breaks the light
and then the wise come in.**

Parables

of lost lucidity,

**isn't that a camel,
are my legs on fire?**

**Read this ode
to the end and hear it holler,**

**the mystery
is in the afterlude,**

**the play of light
on the sleeping lover's cheek
breaks your heart
and that's just the beginning of the Mass.**

**The congregation of one
has not yet awakened
from sermony slumber,
no bread has changed its crumb
into living flesh, no wine
is even there.**

**Yet we are changed.
Asleep or awake the god is present—
a sleeping god is the most powerful.
Remember it is weak to wake.**

16 April 2013

=====

**It will get me there
before I do
your banjo Tizzy
will be planging**

**and suddenly the woods
are full of dancing
round and rabbit
square and fawn**

**I like the attitude
that you've got on
you make me hide
myself in hearing.**

16 April 2013

=====

**Get me out of the picture
then you can see
the mountain the ocean the yellow
lichen on the rocks by the shore
the blackbird walk the gull soar
you can even see the wind
see the sound of the waves.**

16 April 2013

ISOLA

**The sea whispered
into my right ear
through your lips
it smelled like your breath.**

16 April 2013

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**Be fluent and forgive
the wheel is waiting
it becomes an animal
hurries to your house
slips under the door
and soon learns to talk.**

**What does a wheel say
while you are sleeping?
What else are dreams
really except wheels
still or turning, wheels
or your ancestors still
trying to remember?**

16 April 2013

