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Artists are sometimes so cautious,
want to put things into place
before there are things to put.
First bite the apple, then
digest it, sin, leave Eden,
all that. Just to make a world.

Give yourself no time:
say it fast as you can
till they're all there
waiting for you to play with them
wet words sticking to the flanks of the sunshine.

27 March 2011

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poem:

from ποιειν, 'to make,'
hence *poema*, a made thing—
a thing that is good for nothing else.

dance:

a woman trying to turn
into her shadow.

flower:

earth's violent argument with light
advanced one thesis at a time.

27 March 2011

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Things written in the dark
morning discoveries
despair of ever breaking through
to the never been said

and be peculiar all my days
the way the red-tailed hawk
slips over the sun and vanishes
in brightness then comes back

to where we all are, beautiful,
menacing, always trying again
the way of beginning, gilded
picture frames held up to the sky

exhibiting emptiness.

28 March 2011

NEWCOMER

I was born on the day 1-Deer
right in the core of the day.
Grandfather Thomas—my last
grandparent living—died the same day.
The day before, 13-Death, all the
dead of the whole year before
passed into Paradise, Xibalba,
Purgatory, the experimental regions
where the dead go. Leaving me
terribly new in a world with no old in it.

I never knew how to be old.
Or to be dead, the old and the dead
were all gone. How to learn
these things. Death
comes with its own instructions
but life does not. How new
everything still is! Even now
I'm barely born. Leaves
have not even begun to bud
and the lilac's still dry twigs
frozen stiff in the hard wind.
I was born the first day of fall
and now it's set to spring—
so much left to understand!

To get some sort of grasp
of the world before I was.
Books and ruins, strange
people walking in my brain,
house, street. What am I
supposed to do, of all things
that can still be done? Will
what happens still be me?

29 March 2011

BALDACHIN

Now late in the intruding
a secular hour broken from the branch
—makes sense you think
but so much for thinking—
she picked this up and held it to her lip
—the singular less sexy than the plural—
while something thought itself
inside her then she wrote it down.

2.

Parsimony, illness of churches.
Bernini's thumbprint maybe
lost in marble, shown. Great
twisting columns of brass
above the altar as if to show
something going on down there,
footsteps in the sky.

3.

No matter, we all are princes here
stuffed with wanderlust and dubious desires
—shaped like cameras, sound like Brahms—
we capture anything and everything
in high definition except for the words.
The words tend to fuzzy. The words leak.

4.

So I'm prejudiced. They claim
I talk fake Romani.
Could be. They say I do everything
too much. Must be true
is they say it. They
are the masters of language,
language is the product of their no minds
and is their imperious instrument.
How could what they say be wrong?

5.

Easy to be wrong I find.
If the stone falls, I am wounded.
If the tree us struck by lightning
my eyes catch fire. We live in glare.
This I that does and says so many things
is the common victim-villain of the world.
Beseech him for me to absent a self,
bid him whistle in the lilac bush
till spring hides him under purple flowers
that rise to his caress. That
will be the day. Halfway to May.

30 March 2011

THE RIVERMAP

for Raquel Rabinovitch

The spectacle of everybody busy being
takes breath for beauty

the three sufferings of sentient life

the rivermap & we're done

said Olson.

She brought instead
the rivers,
let them say their own mythos
sign their own portraits,

when you get down to it,
a map is mud.

2.

Well begun is half done.

From the dried mud of one
make wet with the water of another

or from rain, the unicursal river
declare a likeness to history
that investigation of where anybody
once may have been or gone,
touch of rain, touch of skin,
the tooth of memory
that blinding approximation
that marshals and misleads.

There is no memory, there is only water,
every river is Lethe,

no memory, only what the river remembers.

3.

The watershed writes its long alphabets across the plain.

What does the river do, Nile or Annisquam?

A river touches.

A river arrives
and touches you. Even a river that is no river
—like the Harlem, the East—is a river,

a river is a moving water in between,
don't sweat the source or where
the thing comes into whose mouth,

even the evil Wallkill

conduit of shame

running north in a south-tending landscape

running from a Jersey lake up to a decent Blue Mountain stream,

even that

bitch of a river

comes to the sea

circuitous, by a long promenade

through the miseries of humankind,

gold dust and dead Mohicans.

What grief I knew along its banks,

it leached my skin off and left me

nothing but words

gibbering literature,

you can smell the mean of it a mile away.

4.

So I blame the river for everything

and here in her studio I study the river's confession,

compare it with what other rivers said,

Take time to know me, Be small to read my writ,

my writ is named in water, and mud remembers.

5.

But what shall it profit a woman
to pick the whole river up?
She will write with it,
little bibles, tender lies
with music in them,

write with it
till everything you see
becomes the same color
more or less
a song

An old peddler came to our town
selling buttons and mirrors
buttons and mirrors
to give to your lovers
buttons to bind them
mirrors to make their rivers run

and when they come
 smiling
to knock on the door of your bungalow

you put down the mallet and wrenches
the pens and the bandoneon
the spoon and the housecat

and welcome them,

river by river

until there is nothing left
mechanical in you
and all is natural flow,
fluency of the gods,
those poignant broken everlasting
identities,

natural art and natural good

lambent around our dumb ankles—

see, the river has forgiven you,
the river has come home.

6.

From across the room all the maps are brown
but the live brown of moonlight on fallen oak leaves
the warm brown of skin,
we live on a brown planet ringed with blue,

Ωkeanos is the River
of which every other river
is a type and an exception.

We can see that the minute we come in,
the brown planet writes its names for us to read,

so we can know this place.

On the brown planet that looks blue from space
because Lord Ω cean hides us from the all-seeing sky.

We touch softly the river maps she's made
soft roughness of eloquent residue.

31 March 2011

