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## MERMAIDS

*for G.Q.*

*Now there is a love of which Dante does not speak unkindly*

said Robert Duncan about the Sodomites  
Dante interviewed in hell, running ever  
anxious for a 'joining' as the later poet  
chastely said, all manner of unions,

communions. How do we make love?  
The phrase itself is wonderful, argues  
we are a race of artificers, when even love,  
that natural and most difficult ordinary

thing has to be made. And we make it  
however we can. Now there is a love  
that seeks for joining, ok, we'll borrow  
Duncan's chastity (though he reproached

me once for writing all the time about  
fucking, fucking, he giggled it twice,  
I was abashed, startled even, to think  
I wrote *about* anything, let alone that)

a joining that is not a going in (whatever  
goes in must come out, sorrow, sorrow)  
that is no rough insertion or sly  
intromission, a joining that is

continuous and subtle and all-  
embracing the way water is,  
always on the level, always close  
as two substances can be

and I suppose the mermaid  
*was* her love (I too have been  
all my life in love with mermaids  
back from the days of Esther

Williams before I even knew  
what her white one-piece concealed),  
was pure woman in her element  
welcoming her lovers in sheer equality

as if they could become another  
chemical, a radical ecstasy  
of being *with* her deeper than  
any possible being in.

Think of the gloss on a blackbird  
in strong sun—we are wrapped  
in sensation—think of roses  
growing by the sea in June

but your eyes are closed,  
think of a sip of Moët  
in a pretty woman's lips  
across the room and music

you'll never see her again—that's  
how mermaids make love  
to you. But how do we,  
you ask, make love to them—

the nub of love is to be  
nimble mindful in the space  
we in some moment share—  
beast with two backs

they used to call lovers  
at their work, so too  
you with her, you share  
an element and hour

though she is all image  
and you all animal  
your accidents unify  
in one single essence

(forgive my Thomist  
grasp on her lovely  
greenish hair)  
so that a sailor passing

would look out and watch  
only a man cavorting  
and would cry out  
Look, there is a man

making love to the sea.

20 June 2012, Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

Having what you need  
this song of grace  
bird not yet  
all one far gull—  
fish crow at the western end  
of time—awake  
over the island  
the flesh of sky.

21 June 2012, Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

Storms pass us by  
speakers with no signal  
sea calm—one  
cat grinds downhill.

The nowhere language  
of a pampered minority  
I speak. My grammar  
slips over your hips.  
Dommage they say in France,  
too bad we are not bad.  
Level-headed almost dumb  
all I am is motivation.

21 June 2012, Cuttyhunk

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Time for confession

I have nothing to confess.

I've been here from the beginning

maybe that's crime enough.

21 June 2012, Cuttyhunk



= = = = =

But if they saw what they sang  
what would they see?  
Would it look like a woman  
standing on the path in the woods  
delighting in the sounds of birds  
and calling out to them from time to time,  
even trying to imitate their calls,  
rufous towhee, Carolina wren?  
How slow she saunters.  
How radical their noise,  
profound trace of an information  
tea-kettle tea-kettle-tea.

21 June 2012, Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

All songs seek symmetry—  
why twelve-tone music excites  
we charge through chambers of our hearing  
to find and almost hear the missing  
lovers these sounds cry out for.

21 June 2012, Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

I used to have so many Geminis  
now I have none  
it's strange to me, estranges me  
from what I thought I was  
or must have been.  
Am I finally another?  
Is chance romance?

2.

Can there be a day when wisdom fails?  
I asked the brickmaker I asked the smith  
I asked the girl who rides the horses  
they all had convincing handshakes  
but no words, or I had none  
because none of them understood what I was saying.  
What was I saying?

3.

Is it this day, sun glare, haze much,  
is it all about weather?  
Metarsimancy, it's obvious enough,  
just read what the day is telling  
mostly your skin.

4.

I mean mine, I keep getting distracted  
by what I see from what I know.  
A handful of white radishes from the garden,  
interesting dirt around their stems, dirt,  
this earth I stand on.

5.

Or how far the apple falls from its tree.  
Sheen on morning windows.  
All day long we eat the air  
and think nothing of it, chew and swallow—  
this root is life, and all the rest  
is spring and summer, face in a mirror,  
a piece of bread chewed slowly,  
vows' renewal, sadly serpent  
on the gravel a leash without its dog.

6.

About wisdom this old was  
with questions, no? Across the border  
they look at you a different way,  
as if you were really there  
taking up space, even casting a shadow.  
Here we wouldn't dare to. Honey  
keep your shadow in your pocket  
if they step on it you'll never be the same.

7.

Well I got no answers from the lawyer  
and the priest was out of town  
I picked a leaflet from the gutter  
read DEPAR OF ARKS  
and knew the flood was coming.  
Or had come and left me here alone.

8.

At last, as if this  
is what I was,  
a solitary and a relic man,  
and all the rest had floated off  
in animal snug security  
following an inspired leader  
and left me here awake.  
Wisdom turns a man to face the wall.  
Wisdom stitches feathers to his heels.  
Wisdom lights a candle in his skull.  
Wisdom tells him Now you are invisible.

9.

So walk in the shadow  
walk in the sun  
it's like a story but it never tells.  
Can I say I wrote

my whole life's work  
for you because I like  
the way you sit on a chair  
the way you sometimes  
look at me as if I'm there?  
Everything anybody ever did  
is with them all the time.  
*Kairos*, the appointed time.  
This is where you were headed all along.

22 June 2012, Cuttyhunk

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I wrote it with seawater  
wrote it with glue  
one way or another  
got through to you

this is not what I meant  
not what I started to say  
sun in the doorway  
and the air is still

should I use milk  
like invisible ink  
should I use blood  
that darkens in daylight

I meant to say nothing  
at all, meant to be quiet  
and let the birds out there  
do all the lecturing

it's all gossip anyhow  
the mind and its friends  
body and soul and the strange  
fact that we feel inside

where nothing really is  
just the shadows of what  
we've looked at,  
echoes of what the stranger said.

22 June 2012, Cuttyhunk



## A TORINOI LO

The plodding horse in the first shot  
seen in profile as he trudges  
into a whirl of dust and fog  
after a while his muzzle  
his jaw begin to look like  
a wolf. All animals  
are the same animal.  
Every mouth swallows  
having bitten. Every eye  
stares out at me  
in terror and confusion and rage.

22 June 2012, Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

Dogsled skimming on the sea  
I try to tell you what no one saw  
there are rhymes that feel like miracles  
in old poetry, a shallow comforter of cloud  
below the sun. And mist. Visibility  
half a Roman mile. Hen pheasant  
walked across the grass, catspaw  
of mainland reaching out to the island.  
Fear. Try not to notice. Live in the past.

23 June 2012, Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

We're not trapped.

Isolation is Eden.

To be alone outside for a day

is to recover something I lost

without knowing it.

To be alone is to accept

my freedom. Not independence,

there's no such thing, but being free.

For a day to do and not do.

And then this freedom is my habit

surfacing like seals in sunlight,

meaning so I know they're there,

then sinking back into what I am.

23 June 2012, Cuttyhunk

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Where does the weather *go*?

Does yesterday's heat

rush to torment

the middle of the sea?

23 June 2012, Cuttyhunk

**[SENTENCES]**

Spelling words the old way opens doors.

The skull oft forgets the face outside it.

Mind on something else he called flowers the whimsy of God.

Not thinking just speaking let the words show the way.

I am a crow I eat what dies at my doorstep.

Explaining pain a way of bearing it.

Aimless traces of a night well spent.

Footsteps on the stairs the sun rising.

Shrill blackbird mother leaf.

To caress matter itself most intimate.

Cool breeze a signal from a distant hunt.

Venus falls and draws us all upon her.

We are she loves.

Luster of lost things still shines in mind.

Musit a hole in a hedge take Shakespeare's word for it.

Light in cloud Adriatic tell one glass of water from another.

Taste and be.

Random interlopers girls in the flowers.

Drop shiny keys on the grass to find the door.

Swallows fly away with the sky.

What is the name of a bird seen in dream.

A shadow of a silhouette I follow through the woods.

They begin the celebration carrying baskets of fish.

Everybody knows everybody but me.

Aligned with the obvious small fish in shallows.

Nacreous humor women glow in the dark.

...23 June 2012, Cuttyhunk