

12-2011

## decC2011

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I tried to scrub away a shadow  
a woman told me that was stupid  
I tried to forget what she said  
and stare out at the river instead

but it was hopeless, the water  
had her skin, the currents babbled  
like a bunch of girls, I shut  
my eyes to drown their music out.

10 December 2011

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But it was something like a closet  
to stand or hide in, something  
in it like clothing, clean, heavy,  
smelling only of wool and fleece.

And fur. What kind of animal  
has this kind of fur. Forgive me  
when I see or think of anything  
or anyone dead I feel it's my fault,

it is my fault, we should be able  
to keep everyone alive, death  
is a convenient lie we fall for.  
Everyone from whom and by whom

this clothing was made is dead.  
If it is clothing. I feel a question  
trembling in the air, the kind  
that smug analysts tease us with,

we poor lovers of the almost  
actual, we children of desire  
wandering in dark narrow places  
think every hole is our home.

10 December 2011

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Shift from the mirror to the mill  
let your eyes grind a stranger grain  
the tough of ordinary, the light  
that looks right through you

the singing light. Imagine this  
we sail in shoes across dry seas  
we bear heaven on our heads  
angry stars, the weight of God.

And you just want to stand there  
trimming your mustache in the glass  
buzz buzz your face in the firmament  
you can learn nothing staring at such eyes.

All of which seems plausibly, painfully true.  
But why does Robert call himself you?

11 December 2011

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He decided the size of things matters

he decided the earth was big

he decided to travel

he decided to cross the first ocean to come along

he decided there would never be the other side

he decided to keep it morning all the time

he decided the height of trees too far away to name

he decided there were creatures in the woods beyond the pond

he decided to go among them and preach

he decided to hear music whether there was any or not

he decided to go home but lost the way

he decided it was the sky's fault

he decided to follow the sky all the way to the end

he decided the air was full of people he almost recognized

he decided the air was a tower and climbed it

he decided to look in a mirror and see what he'd find.

11 December 2011

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Slow accretion of absence  
till the glass is empty  
sunshine comes that way through  
pours in and out of the dark.  
The trees and the birds  
hear us so well, we hear  
them as mere generalizations,  
as if the sounds we hear  
were their actual voices.  
Stare into the empty  
glass and listen.

11 December 2011

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I keep trying to tell you something but it keeps coming out words about words. Nonetheless there is a window. There is a woman sitting at it in a café that no longer exists as such, though everything in it still exists, as Aquinas pointed out long ago, nothing that exists can ever stop existing, a radiant if terrifying axiom just a stone's throw from Siger of Brabant's insight into the eternity of the world. Eternity of matter. Both men are said to have died excommunicate. The woman is perched on one of the five tall stools intended for quicker, solitary coffee drinkers who don't propose to linger at a table over their laptops or contracts and leases. People who want to come in and warm up with a latte without wanting to commit themselves to being really so far inside, people who want to perch at the shallow ledge and keep an eye on the street into which, at what they hope is the right moment, they will dare to make their exit. But she is not looking at the street. She wears a leather coat of a brownish kind, not much different from the hue of her hair which falls over and conceals her face at least from me. Who knows who else might be looking. She is reading, or appears to be reading, a thickish magazine. She may really be surveying the street furtively, who knows. I've decided though that she isn't, couldn't care less about who walks by or who might be idling outside wondering if he should come. My knees hurt sitting so long watching her. Why am I talking about her? She has lived maybe thirty years, a sturdily built woman neither fat nor muscular; she reads her magazine and never looks up except to sip from her cup, a paper cup when she could have asked for ceramic if she had cared, the latte or coffee was probably cold by now. It tastes better, or at least tastes more, at room temperature. Not cold at all, just the temperature of the room. Cooler where she sat at the window as it was beginning to get dark out

there. Why am I telling you this? I studied her hips, the thighs as they angled down beneath the ledge, her knees seemed pressed against the wall. What do her knees have to do with our lives, my need to tell you something? Your need to hear. You need to hear me say something that isn't words. I don't think there can be any space in the world more sacred, is that the word I mean, one more word, sacred it is, nothing more intense than the specific air between a woman and a man, unknown to each other, when one is looking at the other and the other is unaware. Sacred, trembling with possibility, ripe with with fear, harm, confusion, loss, excitement, hope. It is as if all the love and cruelty and disappointment and fulfillment in the world vibrate in that space.

But I felt nothing for that woman. She was something on which the eye rested, as it might have rested on a tree or a sleeping cat. The soft folds of the leather, the dull auburn of the hair, these were soft resting places for my eyes. My eyes need rest, I have read so much, stared so hard at blank paper till words appeared—hard work, that summoning of something from nowhere. Maybe I tried to summon something from her, or am doing it now. Something I need to tell you. It isn't about words, it's about distances. The distances are all we have—that's what we take home with us every night if we've been out, out with people, carousing, discussing, demonstrating, shouting in some loud *manif* as the French say, or quiet miserable moping by some gloomy body of water, even a river will serve, at twilight, last light, alone or with others, still bringing distance home. That's what we wake to every morning. How far everything is. Or not. How terribly close, sometimes. It depends. Words can't help me here. The distances are absolutes, like numbers. There's no arguing with seven. It just is. Frankly, it scares me. I suppose this woman could be thought of as scary too. No face, just the leather shoulder turned towards me. Skin but not even her own skin. How long has she



been here? My knees are sore from sitting. Not even her own skin. What kind of a woman has no face to turn to me? What am I doing here? Have I been clear with you yet, even now, all over again, once more, once too often, is it me or aren't you even listening? Why bother listening when I can't tell you what I need to tell you, only odd speculations about some woman. Not even speculations. We still no nothing about her, nothing about what she's drinking, what she's reading. Some words, naturally. Maybe some pictures too, maybe even a picture of a woman sitting on a chair that she's staring at, wondering.

(11-12 December 2011)

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They have to know  
where they're waiting  
lives pulled apart  
the boat always leaving

the train always late  
everything runs away  
why does anybody  
ever believe me?

12 December 2011

## SINGULARITY

Close to time  
the clock stands still  
you want to say  
what never said

there is agency  
and a red flower  
ends the story  
in your lap

dream of thorns  
of utensils  
we need to sleep  
use in the dark.

12 December 2011

## MANOEUVERS

Long lines of khaki  
trucks and jeeps  
cannons caissons  
moving north on 97  
by the Delaware  
1944. On  
manoeuvres they said  
going slow, governors  
on each engine no  
faster than forty  
they said, slow up  
hill along the cliffs  
civilians trailing  
fuming the way summer  
drivers are. Years  
pass, bothers me now.

12 December 2011

**9:04 A.M.**

Cars late to school.  
Cars do all the work.  
Cars think.  
Cars make love/  
Cars mostly die quietly  
at home some die  
spectacularly.  
Hard to imagine  
cars have people in them  
what are they doing  
in cars, why do they  
let cars take them  
where cars want to go?  
Are cars  
just horrible horses?  
We die from a myth  
of agency. Innocents  
carted by cars  
to where cars assemble  
cars let listen while  
cars think out loud

12 December 2011

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Tension is another latitude—the jug on the shelf three-quarters full of Palestinian virgin olive oil, the smell of it on your fingers after the cruet is filled, I taste your fingers in my mouth. Stillness of something held. It is like the Mohawk in a quiet season, no floods, Amsterdam at peace, Auriesville the quiet blood soaks in the hill. Blood is the color of time passing. Will you let me do all the things I need to do and still be you?

12 December 2011

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Broken anything like a fruit hard-scaled, cherimoya or alligator pear. Nothing easy after Eden. On this day the serpent remembers arms and legs and weeps—memory is Jehovah’s final punishment, bitter as the white pulp round the pomegranate’s rubies sour sweet. Garnets almandines. Socialist paradigms recalled by starving men in freezing parks. Hope was our arms, confidence our strong legs. I was angry and smashed the empty dish, and the room was filled with odors of all the foods it might once have held, would have held in the interminable future of material things. This is the saddest story I have ever told.

12 December 2011

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Sometimes streets also crack open and let you see the lines of motion moving beneath them, sewers or subways, huge bundles of cables, lost streams discoverable on old maps. Sometimes you go down there and travel them. A thing is to travel. Walking under a street takes you where the street *really* wants to go, undisturbed by the capitalist fairytale that builds a phony city over real streets. Where reindeer or buffalo migrated. Or the tinkers came, travelers with strange words in their mouths. None of their words meant you. The world began that way, a god wanted to paint his old car. He took color in his mouth and breathed it out.

12 December 2011



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She liked to watch the boy eat fire then spit it out. She thought of what the fire was like in his mouth, chalice in his cheeks. She knew he didn't really swallow the fire. He had something in his mouth like alcohol or gasoline, spat it out through a flame held close to his lips so it looked like he was eating fire, or had made fire in his belly like a dragon then spat it out. She knew better but she liked thinking of the fire in his mouth, in the arched cavern of his mouth, alongside the monstrous boulders of his teeth, fire brooding inside to rush out in one fatal kiss. To kiss that kiss, Where had he learned to kiss like that. How many lovers had he scorched or burned away with his caress. When she thought like this, she'd sometimes find her lips trembling. Her lips too were thinking.

12 December 2011

## STEPS (10)

on one hand have

gave gave witness

a park a park had eyes

break or other thinbgs

by bundlers of derivatives

unspoken usury of speed

not a blue vein/fact to be seen

the carpenter nailed to his wall

the old Yugo grocer

locked in his storeroom

Feelings free'd

w/ no Mind to mind 'em

for Gold hath every Pleasure in it

& every Metal yearneth to be Gold

the internet the instantaneous

mathom means treasure

Madoff is just the one who got caught

fallguy for the bundlers

so we who were born in the depression  
a strange generation  
we expect nothing  
tried everything  
but the church was always burning down  
the war was always beginning  
every Sunday was Pearl Harbor  
every weekday morning 9/11

but we could speak  
could chew our savage songs  
in grunts of licit music  
my god the piano was tepid  
needs Coleman needs Braxton needs Cherry  
the bareback trumpet who blew Chenrezi

not a generation we a mistake  
answering always the wrong question

they thought money bears no karma  
money is karma

parcels unceasing  
arrive the doorstep

Shame Them

works a little while

tax everybody equally

remove the cap

make feeble means requisite for public office

rich lawyers are Robespierre

bourgeois fugitives are Lenin

go for Lenin every time

cherish every difference

lose power gladly

build a system and walk away

greed is a symbol of insecurity

make greed as shameful as impotence

new blood is always somebody else's

sit still until you know what to do

Occupy must not be a performance but a method

not just one more spectacle

I fear for America if the movement fails  
if it doesn't stay linked with labor  
doesn't house the dispossessed  
doesn't feed the hungry

the art market is just the market  
art is empty when it connives with number

a young man emailed me his rhymed words and asked me to tell him about the  
poetry market where he could sell his protest, read to acclaim at Zuccotti Park

I shared his shame and did not answer

the society of the spectacle breeds only spectacles

a spectacle for every shade of opinion  
a show of hands  
I just another kind of show

far from knowing the answers  
I don't even know the question

I know about looking away  
and making love to things that seem permanent

why I called the paper Matter

when I still felt there was something to say.

13 December 2011

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Not all of it has to be said  
a white dress on a line  
a cat runs back the shed—  
that tells you all you can bear to know.

13 December 2011