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energumen3

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ENERGUMEN 3 [begun 5 XI 04]

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An epistolary gun swinging back and forth between culture and history, aiming and targeting a feeling - shame - at once hidden and revealed by language.

A correspondence chronicling the flush as it creeps up on us: a feeling, a past, a denial... A text that accumulates collapsing definitions of shame as each author takes his/her turn or chance to dig up undisclosed spaces of description, provocation and whimsy, to hide in and reveal one another's language: this text is a brave undertaking of an encyclopedic texture, a chance opportunity to speak about not speaking, not understanding, the requirements of language and country to retain us in their clichés and referential histories.

The running monologues on shame turn alternately toward, then away, from each other, perhaps ashamed of their ideas, of their realizations, wrong-doings, achievements, desires and denials, but trying to do right by the other person's words, persisting to define the feeling of not wanting to feel, not wanting to remember, hiding in translation, hiding in one's own language while reaching out to another.

*

GOD GENE

(from the *Telegraph*, 15 XI 04):

"Dr Dean Hamer, the director of the Gene Structure and Regulation Unit at the National Cancer Institute in America, asked volunteers 226 questions in order to determine how spiritually connected they felt to the universe. The higher their score, the greater a person's ability to believe in a greater spiritual force and, Dr Hamer found, the more likely they were to share the gene, VMAT2.

Studies on twins showed that those with this gene, a vesicular monoamine transporter that regulates the flow of mood-altering chemicals in the brain, were more likely to develop a spiritual belief."

*

So dark today (28 Nov 04) the street lights never went off; it's 11:12 am now, and under heavy rain the River Road runs besides the street lamps and looks like dusk. Our crepuscule du soir. I want to make you blush, bring the ruddy light back into the day. How to make you blush? Cupid's arrow, Lord Payne's hairbrush, a plate full of praises?

*

Priase. Priapus.

Yet I would be an encomiast of everything.

*

from "L'exil de la parole: du silence biblique au silence d'Auschwitz," Andre Neher. "Kekaloto ledabber: epuiser ses paroles, cela peut signifier, certes, dire tout ce que l'on avait a dire, mais cela peut signifier

egalement, ne dire que ce qu'on voulait dire, arreter le discours a un certain moment, couper court pour ne pas aller au-dela d'une certaine limite."

*

The sense of permission to write bad (incoherent, unknown, defiant) poems. Several times in my life I've been at moments of utter bafflement, thinking the work I was doing was crazed or valueless or just wrong. Each time, that chaos was in fact the stirring of a new level of concern. My Axon Dendron Tree was one of those time, then Songs I-XXX, then Sentence, and most recently Mont Blanc itself.

*

Dream. [21 XII 04] George Quasha asked me if he should throw his stones away (the stones he balances as part of his Axial installations). I urged him not to do so. Very tenderly explained how he should keep them. And start from this awareness: an isolated stone is a boulder, a xenolith. Every such stone signifies _woman_. The presence of woman, shakti, marked, made present by the presence of the stone. Size is immaterial. Each array of balanced stones is a life, a zenana full of the women of one's life. To throw away the stones would be to deny, abjure, banish women from one's life.

*

Later, after waking from that dream, I realized that the central fact of Christ's suffering, 'passion,' was signed by Golgotha, the rock, the bare stone hill they called Calvarium, the skull. It is on this stone that Christ founded his presence in the world -- a presence commemorated also by a church --founded on Peter, the rock -- and authenticated by the stone rolled away from the Easter tomb.

Not the cross, the rock.

*

Work with Golgotha, the rock itself, the usually forgotten actress in the Passion. It had to be on a rock. Rock = skull, skull = womb. The skull is the permanent mother (witness also the dura mater) in which we live -- the skull is the womb we never leave till death.

Wherefore the image of the soul delivered from earthly life is a naked woman slipping out of the suture at the top of the skull -- years ago I dreamed that as my crest.

*

After years, how many must it be now, twenty, more? of getting by on four to six hours of sleep a night, and choosing that, I have decided (choosing this) to sleep 'eight hours' a night and see what happens. For the past two weeks I've been doing this, getting about seven hours but once in a while a full eight -- and what i find is what I'm experiencing and remembering 'my' dreams.

Dreams have come back. To dream a lot is like having a distant, intelligent friend who gets in touch from time to time, erratically but wonderfully. To be back in touch with my dreams is like realizing i have a beloved friend not far away.

*

All the "great religions" are founded on rock:

Buddhism on the vajrasana, the stone at Bodhi Gaya on which the Buddha sat in his Enlightenment, and on which every Buddha sits at that moment, the stone that is the only thing that survives the deaths of universes at the ending of each kalpa.

Hinduism on the stone lingam of Shiva -- Mount Kailash and all its smaller replicas.

Christianity on the rock of Calvary, the skull stone. And on Peter: "On this rock I will build my church. And the stone rolled away from the tomb when Jesus rose and brushed it aside on his way from death.

Judaism, on the stone tablets of the law, of which the written Torah is a copy, commentary, shadow. And on the rock of the altar the Jews were bidden to build after they crossed over Jordan at last into the Promised Land: an altar built of unmasoned, unworked stone.

Islam: the black stone of the Ka'aba, fallen from heaven, round which the Faithful move in a dance step of praise. And towards which every kiblah points.

Alchemy: the stone of the Grail as Wolfram reveals it, also fallen from heaven.

Freemasonry: the ashlar, the unmasoned stone.

We are litholaters. Stone Worshipers. The Stone Age has never ended. Or it has ended, but we still carry our Gods from that time.

*

How powerful No is. People who know how to say No, and say it loud and clear, are able to wield considerable force socially, psychologically, spiritually, even politically. So many world religions seem founded on negations of one kind or another, and often define themselves by what they say No to. (The mediaeval Chinese called Moslems those who do not eat pig -a truly remarkable abstinence for the Chinese! - and called Christians those who do not eat horse - an odd fact they'd noticed.) One vegetarian dominates a whole dinner party, everyone made considerate or uncomfortable or ribald (depending on their own natures) by that solitary No-sayer.

No Sex, No Drugs, No Wine, No Pork, No Electricity, even now are shibboleths set up as definitions of virtue or self-definitions of one group or another - as if testifying to the fact that it's easier to order life by negation than by affirmative precept.

Obviously, the power of No can be used wonderfully and poetically and with tremendous good: Saint Francis, Milarepa, William Blake, Ann Lee. But also with tremendous evil: Hitler, Pol Pot, Mao Tse-tung. It's terrible to think that whole nations were embroiled in wars and millions of deaths because of the power of certain simplistic negations (No Jews, No Intellectuals, No Families, for example).

It's interesting to watch how movements in the arts and literature typically begin by negations (No Rhyme, No Representational Image, No Emotional Transfer, No Key Signature, etc.). Such issues haunt me, since I've been involved with avant-gardes of one kind or another all my life,

caught up so often in the Anger of the New.

And No sounds like New, doesn't it. No wonder we get so confused.

*

I bet if I made a list of books I would never read, or read again, then within two weeks I'd find myself reading one of them, ordering one of them from Amazon at two a.m.

Disdain is often the first signal of attraction.

And what I suppose myself to loathe becomes (like the silly swains in MND) my favorite food, my 'meat.'

*

When a plain woman smiles, there is a radiance no beauty has. How strange that is. As if the plain woman's face were by some witch's spell --or some act of macabre self-control-- kept immobilized in a displeasing countenance until released, for just an instant, by the smile. When a pretty woman smiles, it's just a pretty woman smiling. There is mystery here.

*

The window frames a world. Its neat squaring off of reality, edges and perspective all intact, is literally picturesque: like a painting. A painting is an image you can't enter, guarded by its own borders, frame, supporting surface. So what you see through the window is never what you can enter-- you can go and be in the terrain the window's vista shows, but you will not be in the window, not in the vista--you will be in the [relatively] unbounded continuum of whatever exists. Which is a larger thing than what the window shows (or is), but paradoxically also smaller, since the unbounded is in that sense incomplete, whereas a quiet woman standing at a window looking out sees a complete gestalt, perfect, intact.

And yet of course there is a sadness in this poem. The obvious optical, experiential truths I just belabored in the last paragraph are true, of course they are, but the sensation of exclusion from the world, the self or soul as a shut-in gazing out the window at a world forever denied them -- that's there too, and god knows exactly where it comes from. It's not confessional, I mean I have never felt like that particularly -- but it is what the window itself sings, it is the song of the window (of the painter?) who frames, encadres, a world it cannot enter but can only declare into existence through its own inflexible presence.

Confessional poetry, they used to say. I think all poems are confessional -- but it's the confession that counts. The sins are trivial.

Doors. The lines in the printed book are as the printer made them. And that's fine for this piece, since I think of its measure as prose, and it's best if it looks like prose.

All of my poems in line are attentive to the line, and are to be sounded (inwardly even) as if with a tiny pause at the end of each -- no flexion of the voice, no change of breath [unless explicit punctuation supervenes], just the merest silence. Because silence is the root or womb from which the poem comes, it's lovely to let it show through. I have defined a line of poetry as the shortest path between two silences.

It seems I have many poems about doors, or called doors. This one is a lucid (I hope) metaphor of the possibilities of experience that people don't embrace because it doesn't occur to them to push rather than pull, or pull rather than twist, etc. There is so much in the world. So many spells we can recite or perform to see suddenly the world before the Fall, the primal suchness. And we're always finding them. Now push. Or pull. Or twist. Or slide.

Vision is always a hands-on experience.

*

[after the Basque Variations of today, 15 Jan 05, I found myself thinking:]

And always the other poems, other vistas: the permutations I don't see, or don't understand. The obstruction of the lyrical. The obstruction of making sense. That is why I keep going on writing, forever, I guess, trying to get all of what is offered, trying to get it all down.

*

Quietly awakened by the roar of the water rushing past, the Sawkill over its banks after so much rain and thaw and snow melt, a real river it's become tonight but not yet threatening the road. 5 a.m. 15 January 2005. Across the road a new tributary has been running all day and all night, from the woods and even deeper flooded road east of the Triangle, Sudden lakes and rivers, wake me. I have dreamed things like this so often before, but this one woke me.

*

"...en restant bons amis, nous nous séparons avec Valérie, et toute ma petite existence en a été chamboulée..." says Franck André Jamme in a letter today, and I think about how one's 'little life' is in fact always the other's. One's life is two. I am "the-one-who-lives-with-you."

And that makes me aware of what a monk really is, and what the celibacy of a monk/nun is about: a monk is someone who lives around his own center (even if that center is the image of a deity or task), and no other _single person or persons_ can change his own perception of his life.

*

Could we begin everything anytime again. It seems to me that cosmology is always ready for renewal, the apocatastasis any moment, in our control. The vast explosion of 'light' from Sagittarius the astronomers have been concerned with lately, this is an idea reinventing itself, a world deciding to begin again.

Anew, anew. Or: anew! Anew!

*

In Heidegger's essay on the Ister, interesting that Weis niemand is the last line of the hymn, but almost the beginning of H's ideas about the poem -- flowing backwards again

Raetsel, if that is the word H uses that's translated as enigma, is usually rendered as RIDDLE in English, think about the power of that word, riddle, which names not only the cognitive puzzle that an enigma is, but its verse embodiment (the earliest English poems are the Anglo-Saxon riddles, so called

the machinery of the word may be itself a silent listening, obedient -- but it is we, the human who make that listening originary (that wonderful word

*

Remedium for jealousy. The first time after. The taste of other.

*

Yesterday Peter Wilson showed me a proof copy of a reprint of Novalis' Apprentices of Sais, the one with Klee drawings -- an edition I held in my hand fifty five years ago in the 8th st bookshop, and not since. My body felt a flare of electricity that lit up a sudden landscape. And all at once I understood that the past IS a landscape. Not to be recaptured, not to be lost or won or found or the like, but to be journeyed through, just as we journey through that abrupt and hasty future we call the present.

*

I found myself writing this to a determined but untalented student:

It seems to me the main problem in your work is that you are trying too hard. You're pressing the bow down too hard, blowing too hard into the clarinet. By that I mean you're consciously trying to plan the poem, tell a little story. That can work in poetry if you have some structural device (some weird rhyme or repetition pattern, or one of the constraints we've talked about), but when one is just writing straight ahead, it doesn't do just to disguise a prose statement in lines.

If the poem really is to reveal and surprise even its own author, the author must wait a little, sit back a little, relax a little and let the poem (the unconscious, if you prefer) move things along. The philosopher Heidegger used the old German word Gelassenheit - gentleness, releasement, letting go - to mean something like the creative listening that goes on as one permits the mind to find the poem.

Think on this, and see if it has any resonance. Let the surface dissolve and see what comes to light.

*

The sheep, the cotton gin, the coal mine, the oil well, the car, the tractor trailer, the TV:

The U.S. Government is controlled by, or in fact operated by, different industries at different times in our history:

19th Century: cotton, and the textile industry
late 19th, early 20th: steel and coal
mid-20th century: auto / transport
late 20th: oil. (Not Z.O.G. but O.I.L.)

In the 21st century I imagine we will see oil slowly giving way to the biggest industry, entertainment, with its sidekick the medical business.

Where Goebbels was content to use UFA and the sophisticated German cinema to create propaganda for a government under other control, Reagan and Schwarzenegger are pioneers of the actual take-over of government by entertainers. The E industry will dominate the government, will become the government, since it already controls the imaginal world by which the electorate is controlled, and the electorate's 'individual' concerns are shaped.

Liberals are usually, thanks to their laudable but unfortunate love of reason and Cartesian order, the last to grasp the power of the imaginal. A liberal is a boxer who fights with one hand tied behind his back -- he fears and loathes the emotional/imaginal, which alone could make him effective.

*

the premise [of Justin Cammy's lecture] -- the writing by Jews during the Holocaust-- is so urgent. There is a curious way we have of relegating it all to the domain of remembering (rather than experiencing) -- and then promptly exalting Memory and writing dissertations about the 'construction of memory' -- as if to avoid yet one more time and in one more way the horrors of the actual. As if it existed ONLY in that zone of fantasy we call memory.

*

about Celan's Genicht.

I was thinking along these lines: the Kabbalist 'trinity' of

Air Soph Aur = the No Limit Light

Ain Soph = the No Limit

Ain = No/None/Nothing

where I take the highest term (the last mentioned) to be precisely gesturing towards what Buddhism speaks of as sunyata, Emptiness -- that is, the unconditioned.

So in terms of the misery of history, we are working with something like the Negative Trinity, like the qliphoth or shells in Lurianic prophecy

So das Gedicht , culture as we know it) usually functions in the world of Light, that is, the world of reflections we call history (light makes shadows, shadows are the persons and events of history)

the world of history vomits its unselfing in such an event as the Holocaust, the limits are gone, the edges lost, the definitions of human relations and cultural premises are blurred or destroyed. This is the limitless, with light gone. This is the phase that Adorno is describing in his famous statement -- which I take as exactly phrased and intended- that after

Auschwitz only barbarians can write poetry -- barbarians being exactly those who had no limits to lose, they are the ones who had no culture (in the Greek sense of barbaroi) to lose the edges of, hence are still able to speak

but when we come to the Ain itself, the radiant emptiness, everything has dissolved and we are back in the lightless but also darkless world of utter change, from which anything may come again.

This is das Genicht -- the nothingness or Ain that is now productive (both the ge- prefix and the rhyme with Gedicht say this), it's not just nothing it's The Nothinged, and in that huge vacancy yawns (chao as in chaos = to yawn) all the possibilities to go on. Das Genicht is the Beckett character saying (some years before PC, actually, isnt that so?) "I can't go on. I must go on."

And that is the soteriological. By going on (writing, for instance) the self (the plausible "I" of any "I must" kind of statement) saves itself.

The soteriological is, bien sur, profoundly psychological. But what else is salvation if not a salvation of me and thee, and especially of the "I" who

reads. The "I" who writes.

From the first time I ever read the line (which, you might be pleased to know, I always hear spoken in my head out loud in your voice, relishing with almost Austrian esh-ness the ch of Genicht), I felt in the presence of a word, a concept that "troestet und hilft" (to cite the least likely source for Celan -- though you know I keep finding RMR in PC, but that's another Geschichte -- or maybe a Genichte...),

so das Genicht seemed the essence of all we could hold to, all that would save us. And the Kabbalistic "Ain" came quickly to mind.

to get this down -- hope it helps us focus. COme back at it if you want. For the Kabbalist, the Ain (same word in Arabic isn't it, as ayn?) or No or No-ness, is the highest of all, the supreme.

In Vajrayana Buddhism there is, by the way, an exact equivalence:

Ain Soph Aur = the Nirmanakaya, the Buddha manifest in and as the world

Ain Soph = the Sambhogakaya, the Buddha manifest in and as the imaginal world

Ain = Dharmakaya, the supreme reality, the Buddha unmanifest but the essence of everything -- a naked blue man sitting alone in the desert of the sky, is how the Dhamakaya is shown.

Quoting Pierre Joris <joris@albany.edu> (8 April 2005)

> Dear Robert,

>

> lovely to see you in Nueva York & ride up the Hudson with you &
> Charlotte. More! As soon as there is some free time I'll call & we'll
> do lunch in Hudson -- or we'll get you up here as you have not yet seen
> the new digs.

>

> Meanwhile I am trying to work your thoughts on the soteriological into
> the essay -- & want to quote you on "Ain Soph to Genicht" -- but would
> want to discuss this a bit more with you beforehand. Do you see the
> "Genicht" as the poem (Gedicht) via negative theology? But how does the
> "Genicht" have salvific qualities? Or does the move from the Kabbalsit
> Ain Soph to the Genicht happen differently, i.e. not as a sldie from
> positivity (I do associate Ain Soph with Light & the limitless, or
> better limitless light (waffling -- that part of my library is in
> storage & thus can't go to my books).

>

> So, any insight much appreciated.

*

Creeley. What he revealed, as no one had before, is how to carve time with silence. Others worked with measured silences and artful delays; Creeley worked with the natural silence of speech, of breath, and taught us, or at least taught me, this most radical of all our shapings-- the natural gap dancing among the words, the Ginnungagap from which the cosmos of the poem organizes. He made it less possible for rhetoric to take over. He made the poet conscious of the speaking, not of the word.

*

The fountain pen as syringe. The injection is necessary. We think we know what we think, but we don't really know what our or any thinking _amounts to_ till we write it 'down.' My big black and gold German pen, Mont Blanc they call it. Fountain Pen, the pen is fountain, the penis-fountain, source of that minute inveiglement or seed that enters the womb --think of Courbet's "The Origin of the World"-- and makes the world. The womb is the other. Meaning enters the other and makes something happen. This is society, whose doors are kept by Kafkan doorkeepers dressed as psychiatrists and priests.

Writing is entering into the being who thinks. Writing is the initiation into the public self, to achieve which the private self must die away -- just as the private (=secret, unforthcoming) self dies in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis makes you talk -- makes you put into words the things you think you think, and makes you put into words the things you say instead of thinking, the thinking that covers what is really thought. Every word is the return of the repressed.

Agamben on the thing itself, _to pragma_, that is not written, citing Plato's Seventh Letter.

*

And beauty and angels make me think of Agamben again, his beautiful essays on the demonic in Benjamin, and on the Indo-European reflexive *se- The *se in particular seems to point to that linguistic function that makes memory sayable -- though that's not his point in the essay, as far as I remember. It is the reflexivity of language, the ability of me to operate on myself, to hear what I am saying, to hear (and remember) what I said, that makes memory possible -- memory, as distinct from bruises or breaks. The memory that is mindfulness aloud.

*

Anger. I will only put Christian poems where Catholics will not find them.

*

What is really surprising about my dream transcript/poem is how feminine the I sounds. Even though I am "Mars," somehow my voice sounds more and more like a woman the further into the text you read. I'm not sure what I mean exactly by 'like a woman' but it is perhaps a combination of sounding not entirely like myself. I think the best line in the text is "He didn't even watch us play"-- the need to be seen and observed and liked and approved of while caught-in-the-act that only children and (greek/roman) gods seem to enjoy.

*

Agamben's Remnants of Auschwitz is so powerful, alerting, summoning, clarifying. Such profound respect for the words, which are the only monuments we really can erect.

(as unlike that vile ugly boneyard in Berlin -- where are the names of the perpetrators inscribed? Once again, it's all about the victims, commoditizing them and ignoring their murderers, whose descendants can wander

among the blank steles, blank pages, and inscribe them as they choose. Play among the symbols that so poorly stand in for evidence. If they wanted cement stelae, it should have been six million of them, scattered through every town in Germany and Austria, with a few dropped in Switzerland -- near the border crossings, and in Berne -- as a reminder.

I bless Agamben for his brisk dismissal of the word 'holocaust' -- I used to carry on against the word even more fiercely. But people just didnt want to know. It is not an offering to the gods, not a sacrifice of something of which you had the right to dispose. It was a murder of the others, an attempted murder of all possible others. It was not just genocide, but altericide. And certainly not a sacred offering.

*

Altericide. To speak of that. The Jews were the most other of all, but they did not exhaust the category.

*

The social/political meaning of a film really is like the movie music -- it lets us understand what we see, gives moral and emotional resonance to action and dialogue. Dialogue isn't always or even often about the political agenda, but the agenda should be clear enough to form an emotional and intellectual arc along which the characters interact and actions are deployed.

*

It would take real courage to say that the Jews of yesterday are in any way like the Turks of today, tomorrow. Not in terms of the magnitude of the Holocaust as measured against the smaller humiliations and oppressions of Turks in nowadays Germany -- of course not. But very much so in terms of the personal and public attitude of Germans, their (often well-meaning)connivance with established cultural values, their xenophobia.

Once we relabel the Holocaust (as we should one day do) as the War against the Other, not genocide but altericide, we begin to understand the necessity right now of being clear about the real wellspring of the Hitlerzeit, the way the Nazis were able to use the muzzy, unfocused xenophobia and family-centrism of ordinary people, and focus it into a death-ray.

In Germany today, everybody is a fugitive -- the Turks are trying to escape from the poverty of their own society and the humiliations of an unfriendly Europe; the Poles are trying to escape from the East into the affluence of the West; the Jews are trying to escape from the typecast roles the Germans still cast them in, while the Germans themselves are trying to escape from their history.

Each person is a prisoner of other's perceptions. We can never escape from our images in the perception, prejudice, of the others. We are like images on photographs or films: fixed, meaningful, unalterable.

*

Sex is revenge. Image is vengeance. We are hurt by the images people form of us, and we take revenge by images.

*

(Notes from Cuttyhunk, June 2005)

When we got to the island, we could find only a rose or two in all the stretch of beach along the Sound. Now it's full of roses, white and red, fragrant only close because the sea wind carries all odor away, and the yellow sea poppies, and red-violet beach peas with their tender leaves.

And today the paulownia is subtly but distinctly past its peak. Those pale lilac-colored trumpet flowers, a lot of them are on the grass now, wind-scattered among the island graves. But most of the flowers are still on the tree, the little leaves beginning to out-spiral from the twigs above each cluster, but the flowers have changed their fragrance, there's a smell of loss inside the smell of flowering, a turn towards morbidezza and good night.

*

"only an uncertain passage over ...
... breaking Time's head..."

the great lines from The Changeling come back to me suddenly, the lines I set on the back of Trobar No.1 forty-five years ago, how apt they still seem, to choose the great speech for madmen - and free verse! I should mark these words somewhere in (or as) my memoirs, my next book, my tomb...

*

We are mortal interventions in cosmic affairs.

It's all about us: When the Church insists that Christ is the only (or, in more ecumenical times, just the best) persona and enabler of our personal salvation, I'm not sure that it's so much trying to sustain itself as merchant of that high commodity, as insisting on the anthropocentric nature of the cosmos - the sense that we are the important ones, we humans, and the universe is all about us.

What a strange religion it is - wonderfully personal and generous and kind in many ways, but also harsh, terrified of difference, of animals and trilobites and mosquitoes and other planets, an edifice held together by the rusty hinges and hasps of fear. And fear makes killers.

*

Civilization is chairs.

Sitting is the perfect compromise between the beast sprawled on the ground and the upright angel, wing upraised, announcing heaven - or the upright man erect, defying heaven.

Culture begins when we sat down.

A seated man is a Centaur.

A seated woman is Queen Isis.

Mythology itself is the story seated people tell to those who stand and move.

*

Homo erectus is an affront to heaven. The vertical belongs to heaven, the horizontal to earth.

The horizon is the boundary, the walls of heaven locking the earth in.

The punishment for the arrogance of human presumption in standing upright, speaking, holding against heaven: is the Cross

on which Christ, Perfect Man, dies. Dies forsaken by heaven.

And through his own power comes to life. Not again, but for the first time.
True life.

The Cross is not a symbol of his suffering but of his transcendence - the upright broke the horizon, broke the sky.

And he made the final, definitive entrance for us into the Vertical Conditon.

Now the next Buddha, Maitreya, can appear before us seated. We have inherited our throne.

*

7:48 A.M. What just happened? Gravity changed.

The water poured in slow motion out of the mug as I tried to splash it on the sink wall to wash away a few fugitive coffee ground. But the water slowed. I did it again, with the same result. It splashed slowly, the way a much more viscous substance would, motor oil, say.

The water in the faucet came out normally, just water. But for that one moment and the next, plain water changed, as it sloshed from the blue mug slowed.

*

In a few minutes as I watched, the sun glory in cloud paled to a general sea fog coming in from the south. Half an hour later the fog seems lightening, lifting. Just as suddenly on this island world, what-is-the-case hates to be described. Changes as soon as the words are out of somebody's mouth.

It makes me remember than in French brutalement means 'suddenly.'

Unprepared? What does suddenly mean? I suddenly need to know.

*

How strange it seems, the way I cherish still the memory of T's breath and lips, whispering Ungaretti in my ears so close -- and at the same time I wont answer her phone calls, wont visit. And how true and right both the cherishing and the refusing are.

Memory is not so different from music -- it takes now up and fills it, fills it with different contents in the same rhythmoi.

The potter's hands wield my hours.

Someone writing memoirs is actually working against memory. (Malraux, though he calls his Anti-Memoirs, is thinking not of this.) The memoirist is seeking, fossicking through a forest from which the tru memories come forth unbidden, in their own sweet Taoist (which is also Freud's) time. The ones that come forth by themselves are the real one, the true Beasts whose arrivals summon the ad/ventures. The quest. Those are the memories that matter.

I fear that writing down my life would lose them in a field of recollected detail.

Memory and Recollection are opposites.

*

Je me souviens suggests that the French has lost their memories, and have only recollection. The verb suggest doing something to the self, middle-voice, reflexive, working on the self to disgorge its details.

*

How strange we are. What a narrow range of temperatures allow us ease. I wonder whether there are other physical, sensory, domains where we are so narrowly constricted. Or past those, spiritual ones.

[End of Cuttyhunk notes]

*

To be outside of government, to be ungoverned.

Every Utopian scheme succumbs to personal resentments, spills over into revenges against the real or imaginary (always imaginal) enemies the Utopian Totalitarian conceives and cherishes, against Jews or Blacks or Kulaks or mandarins or Reds or Shiites or Anabaptists or polygamists or eyeglass-toting intellectuals or gays or aliens. Maybe you cant be a Utopian without reacting against the imaginal other.

Find a country that does not, will not, hate: and that will be utopia soon enough. By that fact alone.

Government is crime, personified, institutionalized. Thieves license other thieves to steal. Killers license murderers to kill.

To which only the _Secret Commonwealth_ might be able to respond, effectively enough to keep some heads clear.

Trust human kindness and the dark. PLW's "Endarkenment." Trust the dark landscapes under us, the earthlords themselves. And in the sunny clearing among maples, Pan.

*

The nine-scope -- I use the word I heard to say, not the one I'd necessarily 'choose' -- the nine-scope poem fits me these days. Nine lines = nine choruses, a kind of angel for/of each line,

and the silence at the end, where the reader gets to be, the reader whose work is silence, and around the reader the angels move in their choirs as around God.

The reader impersonates the god that every poem means to praise.

That is what it is to read: to be for that little time immensely the center of the world, being there, just being there, and hearing language praise you for being where, and what, you are.

Absorb the praise = read the poem.

Reading then is theopoetic, tantric, singular. Any reading. Is reading an act or a pass, a deed or a succumbing? It is on the side of time, its own time: what else could 'eternal' mean but this, another time to occupy, all your own?

*

Saints: Verity the hidden one. Eve the lover true. Katherine the pure, whose energy comes from self-revealing, Karinrad, Catherine wheel. Ulrica that rich wolf the world, the world does anything the other thinks -- a wolf hunts what is there, behavior is her prey. Magdalene the master. I live in her tower.

*

Two crosses on the church wall--
one for Jesus, one for you.

*

The climacteric phases of Imperial ages coincides with that anxiety called the Literature of the Secret.

Indiana Jones inherits the 'scholar-adventure' mantle from Doyle's Professor Challenger and dozens of Verne's learned voyagers,

And suddenly our culture is full of scholar heroes.

The latest blockbuster, Kostova's *The Historian*, the sly unknown masterpiece by Markovits, *The Syme Papers*, Fasman's Dan Brown-meets- Borges fantasia *The Geographer's Library* -- all involve scholars in search. And of course the hero of the best selling novel in the world is an art historian...

All culture is pop culture. Things pervade. Everything is pervaded.

What does this signify? Several wonderful naive things:

People know that scholars find out things.

Things that are lost or missing.

People know that there is some secret in the world, a secret lost or stolen.

A secret that the government or church or science has hidden -- a secret we need.

A secret without which we grow old and wither.

A secret that is like Freya's glowing blue eye, like a golden ring, like the cures that announce themselves every day in the paper and disappoint tomorrow.

A lost potency. The age of *The Da Vinci Code* is the age of Viagra.

They are keeping something from me. I need to know what it is.

People send out scholars to find the lost thing. Not scientists any more, we don't trust them, science has become the problem not the solution. Science tells us: there is no secret. Science tells us: there is nothing there. Science tells us: what you see is what you get.

This is intolerable. No, we send out an archeologist, a historian, a philosopher even, we trust them more. The philosopher is above all the one who says: there is more to this than meets the eye.

And that's what we want.

More than meets the eye.

So we are suddenly in a world of readers. Readers are people who want to know more than what they see around them. That is a simple explanation of why they read. Watch them reading in the subway. Reading is not about Not Knowing What Is Here. It's about Knowing What Is Not Here. Not an escape but a journey. In other words, a quest.

To find what the official world has hidden.

So literature, from Harry Potter to Oedipa Maas (Pynchon's Lot 49 was the real beginning of the contemporary quest recital), is obsessed with the quest for the secret.

And the last time that happened was the late Middle Ages, when the legend of the Holy Grail met the stream of Arthurian narrative and flowed together, their confluence creating the great Matter of Britain, the Table Ronde, the quest of the San Greal.

And reached its definitive form (Prose Lancelot, Malory) just as the imperial order -- pope, emperor, nobility, knights -- was crumbling. The Battle of Bosworth Field and the Morte Darthur came at the same time.

In many ways, The Da Vinci Code and all the rest are really responses to the early stages of the collapse of the Euramerican hegemony -- just about the time the Neo-Cons get around to calling the Empire by its proper name, Imperium.

*

In a good poem the four elements are at work and at issue. By the end, one of them wins out, and its victory in that text is the triumph of the text itself. Writing and reading are reciprocals within a single alchemic operation.

Think of the shortest poem common in our language, 'Western wind.' All the four elements are there, working quickly: Fire (western), Air (wind), Water (rain) all leading to Earth (the bed, the calm certainty in which one lies at ease, the peace to which the poem comes. One reason the poem pleases and comforts (and excites) us so much is the swiftness and thoroughness with which the elements are summoned to a strife that is about our life, and the quickness with which they are resolved.

*

That poem may have all the other ingredients:

- vernacular eloquence
- sudden verbal explosion of feeling(Christ!)
- incontestably a religious reference -- though Christ! consciously not so employed
- natural imagery -wind, rain
- love
- the physical body
- emotional directness
- 'honesty'

...

*

Raised Catholic, I have some feeling for ritual -- but also a horror of it, the repetitions, the scrupulous compulsions. I hate it when life deeds and daily doings become ritual. Oh if I could only make coffee a different way every morning, or drink a different thing every waking, warm mare's milk addled with saffron and clove.

To which one answers: If you dont practice conscious, deliberate rituals, you will be used by the unconscious rituals: habit patterns that shape a sleeper's life. Ritual's role is to bring the discomfort of waking, reveille. Repetition cured by repetition.

The rites must be shaped a little differently every day -- the "Proper" and "Common" of the Mass in the old missals -- so the ritual itself doesnt fall asleep.

*

There is only one task: Language giving pleasure.

*

The poet is, I am, an absurd little man left alone in a room with the whole world, just trying to keep the conversation going, just trying not to fall too deeply in love.

*

Sometimes -- and it is a very terrible feeling -- I have the feeling that I am close to a trembling, tentative understanding -- that the Holocaust means something. And that might be the worst of all things to think about it, maybe even worse than the vile people who deny there was a Holocaust. Because if the Holocaust means anything, then there can be no choice, chance, hope. No world.

*

Things like that dont have meanings -- they have details. Bearable, unbearable: details. Which terrify, and haunt us, and guide.

*

If I found myself with any power I would instantly give it away.

I think joy and energy and creativity come into, are expressed in, the vacuum left when power is given away.

*

Why does the body get older, but the feelings in and of the body remain keen, sensitive, alive as ever, so that a drop of rain falling on my wrist is as poignant and total as a kiss, even now, and every sensation is as fresh as when our lives began, and every feeling still "herrlich wie am ersten Tag?"

I think we have more than one body. And to the time-vexed body we see around us (in every sense), there is this Feeling Body which remains youthful, or not so much youthful as new, ever-new. And to that also there is the Behavior Body we see in others and project to them.

It seems to me that the Feeling Body is what lovers yearn to know, connect with, interweave with, in one another. And women wrong who think their swains are after T&A -- T&A is just the mailing address for the body they really want to know, to match its sensations with the equivalents in their own Feeling Body.

*

Lithotherapy. Application of stone to the afflicted part, or to the part closest to the life force. Not just precious stones. All stones have healing power. Rest your head on this rock. The marble heals, as much as the god carved out of it.

*

Never give a child a book intended for children. That intention is the cruelest trap. Give children whatever is there, all round them, open to the interpretation of their eyes and ears, hands and minds. Give them the world.

*

Sandy paths through pine woods. Sea near.

*

Writing with rhyme is so indelicate. It is playing tender love songs on a tuba. Yet before God's altar David dances with a tambourine and God rewards him with whole kingdoms and Bathshebas a-plenty.

So heaven has no taste. Its truest sign is the Sun: the Most Obvious.

*

Open season on hyperbole. I excuse the book for the sake of the beautiful blurb. Maybe that is one form I can master, telling people what to read and they listen, the ones who won't read me.

*

Being in love is being a suicide bomber. You are all intention and high moral ground and more intention, and nobody knows how many will get hurt.

*

Maybe in my next life I'll write Buddhist poems.

Poetry seems to come from the _last_ life, or the first days of this one, the limbic stage, or threshold between lives.

I'm still writing CHristian poems, freed to do so by the Buddha's blessing.

(To be far away to see it clear, like Chesterton's traveler who has to see St Pauls as exotic as a pagoda before he really sees it)

To feel the Christian mystery, undistracted by the horrors of hierarchy and the deeds of the so-called believers.

No, it's more than that. That's just an explanation, not the root. The root is as I said it is above, the poetry comes from what we carry from the last life through the specific doorway we choose for this one.

We grow from the earliest encounters with the languaged space of this life.

My life chose to come to Buddhist practice and clarity through the rich Christian gateway. Amen. We are all gates for one another, each thing the doorway to other things. The profound beauty of interdependence, the pratitya samutpada.

And my language, like myself, shaped by that passage.

(In this dense, one can hearken to the Dalai Lama's strictures against "conversion" to Buddhism. Not to convert language and style, but to go to the heart of meditation, Mahamudra.)

*

Language too is birth trauma. Not just the syntactic patterns and semantic ranges -- the things discussed. Entering into human discourse is the end of the birth trauma.

*

Through the glass roof of the library: I see twelve vultures circling a little to the north of straight overhead.

*

Lama Norlha Rinpoche: A deity is as real as the mind that thinks it.

*

The limitlessness of mind is the answer to all ontological questions.

*

The Chinese relief landscape at the Red Hook Curry House (relic of the Hunan restaurant) == the people in it haunt me, and where they are, and how they go, over the huge sinuous bridge into a busy street of shops. Life is about commerce and being with. I don't know any of their names, not even the river or the town, and I'm not going to pretend I do.

*

Mirror beings: Milarepa, Saint Francis. _One_ joyous, austere intelligence severally available.

*

Christocentric Buddhism.

I don't mix them -- they mingle in me.

*

I told
the other side of my hand

*

So many ways to define a syncline. Look them up and marvel.

*

The systematic absorption of other people's memories: that is what is called culture.

*

When the absorption of the other's memories is not systematic but sporadic and disordered, it is called infatuation, or paranoia, depending.

*

Being in love is privileged paranoia. You spend forever thinking about what she is thinking about you.

*

You leave all the people out and remember only what they remember.

*

Is that what is called history?

*

Imagine what culture would be like if it were the other way round; all people, but no remembering. Is that the nature of animal reality? Or is it the way of the angel. Apocatastasis. Eden.

*

An angel, they say, has to remember only one thing. Or: an angel is that specific remembering.

*

The soft weight of the written-on pages in my notebook.

*

After a warm day, 94° this afternoon, after the noon sun read 102° in Rhinebeck, it is down to 72° at 2 a.m. I sit in the summerhouse. I hear owls calling, many. Not close, not far. First time this summer. And I hear the fox stirring nearby in the trees.

*

Skin rescues us from images, the ones our eyes and ears and memories are so vulnerable to.

Skin has no spectacle, no "society of the spectacle," no society at all but itself and you.

*

People who like to talk like to eat. And conversely. You can deduce the one from the other. It is evidently a mouth thing.

Yet we dont have to take it as sexual oral fixation: it is also true that people who really like to drink often have nothing to say. Or their intake is itself a gesture, every drink they take a challenge or rejection or deed thrown in the face of the mother or the anima.

*

Isnt it strange that humans eat and talk through the same orifice? It would make more sense, logically, for them to expel language through the same orifice by means of which they excrete everything else, but no: we have a number of special orifices of excretion (anus, urethra, pores, nostrils)-- but eating and expressing have to share just one between them, the dear mouth from which such sweetness comes.

*

Fashion notes: people dress to cheer their own souls. Through the kindness of the world, this behavior often cheers other people as well. My little poem "Mica" today:

Sparkle eyelid, gold belt low on hip.
People dress these days
like gifts to one another
given to the eyes, the eyes unwrap.

*

I am older than my parents.

*

Poetry speaks: I'm like the human soul -- I hide in matter.

*

The Priest of Freya -- through what seminary must one pass to stand in such a noble station?

*

People do what they want to do.

This is the only tragedy.

*

How they behave is how they really are.

People use language to hurt each other so cruelly: false explanations, false promises.

*

If they like to spend an hour a week with you, you have 168th of their attention, love, care, concern. That's it. The rest of them you'll never know. And never have.

That's why psychoanalysis is such a sham, though such a sweet, aesthetically appealing one. The psychiatrist is witness to a _performance_, and that's all he ever sees.

The analyst's analysis (=critique) of the patient's performance is, by a heartbreaking synecdoche, offered and accepted as analysis of the performer.

This glib switcheroo seems shabby -- but the name of it, honorable name, is drama. Theater.

Psychoanalysis is the theater of one.

Almost obsolescent in our century, except for its potent effect on, as, theory.

Theory is the same root as theater.

A hundred years ago, all those poets, Yeats, Havelock Ellis, Charles Williams, Eliot, who used _Dance_ as the central metaphor for poetry, the exemplar art of all, how many of them actually danced? I mean with their legs and hips, in space and time, against and with the music of gravity?

Nowadays psychoanalysis is the foundation of the theory of everything: that things can be understood.

That understanding can be explained. Spoken.

Psychoanalysis is the Idol of Meaning.

The naked lady of interpretation, who disappears when her last veil is cast away. Salome is the patron saint of psychoanalysis. Strauss's opera coincident with Freud's major early work.

*

Ectoplastic Government. We are driven by spectral productions -- ghosts generated from the greed of the living, like maggots in rotting meat.

We are ruled by such maggots, ghosts of men.

*

Hypnocracy, the word comes to mind when I need it, to label our polity.

We are sleepers, ruled by the imagery presented to us in dream, a dream that has both waking and sleeping phases, images fed to us by the educational and entertainment industry as the behest of the government or the government's more or less secret owners. The images of the spectacle rule us.

We stir and try to wake. We fight each other for the sake of images we saw in sleep.

*

Benjamin: "Conversation strives toward silence, and the listener is really the silent partner. The speaker receives meaning from him; the silent one is the unappropriated source of meaning."

"--even if sometimes our silences may cause us sadness or anxiety, ... [to] share a discourse on silence and ... speak of our silences and the meaning of such silence for each of us"

*

The question of the question.

The question one waits for, yearns to be asked: is it cognitive (what are you thinking at this moment, where were you born, what was your mother's name, what are you feeling, what do you feel about me?)

is it pragmatic (will you make love with me, will you walk with me, will you remember this?)

There is only one question that asks both ways. It is the Grail question: the one that Parzival must, after years (thousands of lines) of adventures, come to ask: Uncle, what troubles you? (_Oeheim, waz wirret Dir?_)

This is the question that, asked by the right person, restores "the land to productive order."

It is the question that works only when it is sincerely aimed and sincerely sourced, when I ask you, simply, Dear friend, what troubles you? and mean by the question that I will do all I can to alleviate the pain or supply the need imbedded in the troubledness.

And that question, sincerely sourced in this way, is perhaps what one is always waiting to be asked. Even when one does not know one is troubled.

Is Amfortas always aware of his pain? Of the barren kingdom his wound bestows on the natural order? Perhaps not always.

Perhaps the question itself is needed to awaken the awareness of pain.

And it had better be asked only by one who is willing to deal with the friend's awareness, and deal with the friend's pain.

The question itself asks: are you willing to wake me, to open the mouth of my distress and hear what my lips might say, might demand?

*

But there is another question. It is epistemological, can I call it that. It summons me not to feel or desire, it summons me to come to an understanding, to know something. Not something that requires action (I desire you, sleep with me, I am hungry, feed me, I am ignorant, enlighten me -- which are I suppose the Three Things we can give one another). Something instead that initiates consciousness. This question look pretentious, absurd when given out of context (Who are you? How are you? Where are you? What do you want?) -- yet there are moments in one's life when even the simplest query will _force you to the place of the answer._ And that is where I want to meet.

*

Dream (late August 2005). I am standing on the outdoor observation platform of the gondola of the great zeppelin _Germania_. Beside me is Adolf Hitler in a neat pale uniform. He is pointing out to me the glorious new buildings, temples, boulevards, and the great Dome, in his transformed city of Berlin, now also called Germania. We hover above the city, approaching it from the south quite low, perhaps a thousand feet above the streets. Everything is peaceful, clean, silent. Hitler points out this and that, and explains (to my relief) that in fact, once he was elected Chancellor of the Reich, he gave up many of the odd ideas he had used to win votes. Chief among them, anti-Semitism. Soon after being elected, he had stopped all talk against the Jews, and welcomed their full participation in the culture and commerce of the new Germany. Germany comes first, he explains, and those who devote their energies to building it, they are the real Germans. All of his own energies had been devoted pragmatically to the economic renewal of industry and foreign trade, and symbolically to the rebuilding of Berlin into the magic metropolis outspread beneath us. The breeze is fresh and very pleasant. I feel a huge relief at what Hitler is telling me; could it be so? Could all the horror never have happened, and the madness of colossal architecture play out his obsessions, not the madness of genocide? I woke wondering about the relationship of those two obsessions.

*

The tone of Hegel. Strenuous-- he cares. The writer against and for, but not with scorn. He's working _towards_ with just enough confidence to keep going. He has to find the _end_ all by himself.

*

The terrible thing right now to me about the New Orleans footage: all those thousands of people -- what good are they to one another? Each hopes for help from elsewhere, as we have all been trained to do. But they are all there together, and what good are they to one another? We yield all our power to the State, then wait.

The 'anarchy' in N.O. argues a radical anarchy. As once in Auschwitz, last year in Beslan, now here, we witness the failure of the State itself. The State is a mirage of guns. And when the president, smirking and bellicose as ever, wants to do something -- in Baghdad or New Orleans -- all he can think to do is send in the guns. Shoot the looters. In his own graceless way, he is a true exponent of State power.

But the mask of the State is slipping. We see the naked government inside, callous oligarchs hiring sadistic sociopaths to brutalize and control the citizens. But will we sustain this vision that is so clear right now? Will we remember? And work to liberate the Nation from the State?

*

"we" can't win in Iraq because States can only war with other States (i.e., oligarchies can only contend with oligarchies, since every oligarchy has precisely the same values, hence the same rules of engagement) -- and Iraq is not a state, has never been one except perhaps for a few years of Saddam's reign. Once Saddam was deposed, Iraq reverted to being a nation, a maternal territory, a land. In which a hostile invading State can only founder and sink.

*

We have come close then not to the End of History but to the end of the State.

*

Desperate Fiction:

As when you're trying to explain something important about your life to somebody you don't much know, you'll use every trick in the book, any cliché, metaphor, rhetoric that comes to mouth, just to get the thing

across -- including (especially) going in and out of character. This kind of desperate fiction, probably starting for us with Barth. (How Barth and Moody, for example, differ from Vonnegut, who always stays in character, in voice, in shtick). That was the great violation in the mid-1950s of the Jamesian novel -- behold, a speaking character who can from time to time speak out of character, can be someone else. That on the one side, Gaddis' 'invention' so to say of narrative, allegory, remembrance --all you might call Religion, foreign to James as it is to Twain, curiously-- on the other, the two pincer-movements to capture the novel -- the novel as many-voiced, and the literary novel once again as _story_ driven. Probably the many-voices come originally from Dos Passos and Joyce, as much as from the artfully multiple consciousness of Sterne.

*

Who is speaking in a collage?

*

It used to be it always rained on the day Cawuk. Not for the past year or two, though. One more sign we live in Republican Disharmony on this island Am Erica. Things out of true, soon snow July. Though torrid December seems more likely.

*

Does a man wrestle god against god? (That sentence, question, verbatim from dream, waking 7 X 05.)

*

Noble metals ink will not corrode -- this pen Charlotte bought in Bengal -- Lalit, Swiss nib, platinum it says.

*

Hilton Weiss has made me a liter of ink. It follows the US Govt standard formula for P.O. and office ink of 1936. Since the government got this ink ready for me when I was an infant, it seems only right to use it. It writes pale blue, burns dark grey to black soon, is almost waterproof. I love it.

*

Every touch is a quotation from a lost epic.

*

Skin is tradition.

*

The nature of the society of the spectacle
inherits from its samsara roadmap
the insistence that nobody is ever
allowed to be here.

We have to buy our way to repose,
travel there, spend, to snooze in the sun
by way of Club Med.

In this society we must travel to be here.

Pilgrimage: from point of sale to point of sale.

*

Any image in light projected in space becomes divine.

And an authentic glimpse of the divine nature's myriad entity.

*

Friesenlied:

Wo de Nordseewellen trecken an de Strand,
Wor de geelen Blöme bleuhn int gröne Land,
Wor de Möwen schrieen gell int Stormgebrus,
Dor is mine Heimat, dor bün ick to Hus. :!

Well'n un Wogenruschen weern min Weegenleed,
Un de hohen Dieken seh'n min Kinnertied,
Markten ok min Sehnen un min heet Begehr:
Dör de Welt to flegen, ower Land un Meer. :!

Wohl hett mi dat Lewen all min Lengen still,
Hett mi all dat geven, wat min Hart erfüllt;
All dat is verswunnen, wat mi drück un dreev,
Hev dat Glück woll funnen, doch dat Heimweh bleev. :!

Heimweh nach min schöne, gröne Marschenland,
Wor de Nordseewellen trecken an de Strand,
Wor de Möwen schrieen gell int Stormgebrus,
Dor is mine Heimat, dor bün ick to Hus. :!

*

How astonishing it is to realize, really grasp, that this moment, now, nothing special, just now, here, is as full and authentic as any moment that ever was, as 'history.' This is the only moment of life, real as Caesar in Gaul, Akbar in India, Paul falling on the road. This path in the little woods is the Buddha's footpath in Magadha. Now is the only.

*

Driving along the Thruway. Sometimes through the trees you see little houses. The sight comes as a shock, since apart from the cars and trucks and the sleek seamless road, nothing seems to be there except forests, trees, meadows, hills, vultures hovering high over invisible ruins, now and then an eagle. And then a glimpse of the backside of a middle-aged ranch house, a sad garage. Houses near highways are poor houses, we remember, for all the trees. Never a person seen. The houses seem as empty as the woods, almost derelict, wood halfway back through some bizarre recycling. But they also have the unmistakable air of lived in houses. Sometimes my mind lingers in their shrubberies, their patchy back yards while my body hurtles forward at its almost legal 73mph towards Albany.

*

Memory is improvisation. The ontological status of stuff going on in my head: remembering? imagining? fantasizing? inferring? recalling a scene described? a scene observed in 'real life,' in movies, on tv? We argue only about sources, we privilege the absurdity called the real. When it all is real, all the tumbling stuff lined up and shouting and flaring, all the arena of the mind filled with its plausible jabber, its scheming verisimilitudes. Who really knows what he remembers? Try to assign a 'mind event' to its proper category. All memory is improvised. Something happens in the mind now which pretends to have been somehow before. Rightly do we say 'remind.' Just mind again, working with whatever it can touch.

*

Lama Norlha the next day said: Memory is bdag-'dzin, ego-clinging. Only memory makes a 'sense of self' possible.

*

What makes me think the 'me' I remember being has anything in common with the 'me' I suppose myself to be now? We don't even share the memory of remembering me -- since that little boy had no me to remember, and whatever was in 'his' mind at 'that' time is lost forever.

*

All mental suffering comes from memory.

*

Breath is freedom. LNR: Freedom possible only while we're breathing, i.e., living. Not being alive means not breathing. Twice, in people I loved, I have seen the breathing stop -- so gentle. The breath goes out and does not come back again.

*

LNR: Compassion and anger come from the same place.

*

You have to write poetry into the world, and what you write has to satisfy the deepest demand in you -- that is, you have to write the poetry that you really want to be reading, but that nobody else is writing, so you have to do it. The passion, the pain, the distance, the detachment, the fury, the tenderness -- whatever they are, you have to coax them to speak so you can give other people the pleasure and instruction that your masters have given you, whoever they are... [from a letter to Gina Maria Tomasula]

*

[on Gustaf Sobin, from a letter to Dawn Michelle Baude:] If you ever heard from GS about me, you probably got a mixed or strange reaction. We had a week together at Lacoste, I ate at his table and heard the dormice chittering in the roof, we drove (he drove me) around the countryside, Cavaillon, St Remy, Glanum, Arles where we sat a long hot afternoon in the arena. I liked him very much, but I think I displeased him -- I heard rumors thereafter that he'd hated my reading, etc., and then it got all snarled up with the awful business of Bard College having been sort of hijacked into hijacking Lacoste, and sending over a monster (not me!) to run the school, a monster who lasted a week. You may know all this, and what I'm saying now is just making

overt a difficulty in my nexus with Sobin that (from my viewpoint) was pretty much all on his side. So I don't feel I can presume on an intimacy or collegiality that gossip has made me doubt.

Why am I telling you all this? Partly because you reanimated a whole nexus (that word again) of poetry and Provence and Char and the Sorgue and Sobin and fountain pens and the combat I intuited G had with his own family and I know he had with the world of American poetry -- so immensely distanced from America in every way (like Celan from Germany, in a sense) yet his own work incomprehensible without its American, and very specifically, American language. And I'm guessing you and I might have things to talk about in connection with Sobin, his work, his career, his Char.

*

The anonymous, timeless, placeless quality of the concentration camp atrocity photographs. The wretched naked man might be Polish or Dutch or Rumanian or Italian, he has no name, no nationality but pain. The camp where he suffers or from which he staggers could be Maidanek or Buchenwald or Birkenau. It could be 1943 or '44 or '45. Two things strike me about this abstract or abstracting quality of such very visceral, overdetermined images:

They are true to Musulman condition of which we read in Antelme and Levi and Agamben -- these are not the images of victims or survivors but of the personless condition we read of, that seems to have been the last degradation of the proceses. This is the Musulman. He is no one. Or no one but his eerie and terrifying --yes, and disgusting, we know that from Levi too -- effect on those who witness him -- Celan's old question of who will witness for the witness comes to eye here.

And then, further from the horror, I think of Eisenstein who writes, maybe in Film Form, about the California newspaper publisher (John Phoenix, a great American humorist -- mostly forgotten now) in Gold Rush days who had only one little woodcut of a house, and used it to illustrate any article that speaks of a house, whether the house has been just built or has just burnt down. House-ness was all the image had to express.

And this sort of hieroglyphic employment of a visual image is exactly what we get, and perhaps even profit from, when we see these free-floating horror images from Auschwitz (or is it Dachau) that illustrate the margins of the stories and essays we read -- margins that become central, that are what we really remember, what remembers itself in us.

*

Orlog, Ørlog -- fate.

Is it the spoken word?

Seems to be ur/law, primeval law, with law more like Dharma than legislation:
orlog, the primal pattern

ur = (Tib.) ye? The Ever-present Law?

We recur to Edda.

Dronke's translation -- she makes the earlier ones seem like lyric rambling, lyric unfocussed raving, full of (like Auden's version) homeless beauties, scraps of beautiful photographs blown through an alley

now the poetry functions in the machine of the social understandings from which it spoke --

the truly contemporary is always timeless.

I mean when we get the functional deep sense of a word, image, phrase for its primal audience, we are close to its 'true' meaning, i.e., its meaning in eternity.

The accidental is the essential.

Essence is accident.

*

What is the state?

As Massachusetts long ago spewed forth Maine, those ungovernable distances, the forests of up there, so each country spins our, specters out, a dream state of its own.

Phantom Annandale
whose shadow falls on me

with all the building and renewal going on around here,
the place inside those accidents
helped along by what happens to it [that's the point here]
ripes to its original

the Original is what comes at the end.

The original is what something really means.

Ta'wil -- we hurry forward to the beginning.

*

In Old Icelandic, the words for "people" and for "listen" seemed very close --
it makes me think our true name is 'the listeners.'

And all the millions plugged now into their iPods are fulfilling one aspect of human destiny,
human task, human meaning.

*

In the Edda, 'to sit outside' or 'to sit outside to listen' means to do magic, to listen to the spirits of the earth speaking in the night, to hear them, to bid them. Listen is different from hearing. We listen to someone.

We sit out at night
(the church forbade this)
we sit out at night
to listen,

that makes old women of us
after the rain.

Usually, only the old women know how to listen.

*

It is one of those wet November days, cold twilight, when it looks as if the end of the world came and happened while I was in the bathroom, and here I am watching the light sink out of the trees and not even a crow to console me.

*

"For the self-sacrifice to the individual moment, the forgetting of one's integrity and of the multiplicity of things -- this is lyric. The integrity of the opus stands behind the wealth of details as common esthetic point of departure on the one hand. Yet on the other it must be capable of being forgotten [for the sake of] every detail, and this detail must be such that all other details can be forgotten over it. This detailing of the detail, this unique beauty originates in that self-sacrifice of the Whole by means of which whatever detail just happens to be affected becomes itself a small Whole. The whole depth of inspiredness can thus open up in this self-sacrifice." Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p.194, tr. Wm. Hallo. [Erlösung is not really Redemption]

*

Men who go blind see only in their dreams. Then they wake to darkness.

*

Still technically autumn, it has been winter for weeks. And deep snowy winter at that -- it looks like February out there this morning (11 XII 05), the tired roads, streaks of blue sky like a lawyer's smile.

*

And in another sense too I love plain names. (Thinking of my poem of 13 December 2005 of that name.) How grateful one must be to be named John or Ann or Robert or Michael or Mary or Joan -- just to speak of the lucky writers in our own wee cénacle.

To have the same name as a baker or an electrician or a farmer -- what a power that is for an artist, to move free of any expectation, free to create one's own identity. To fill the common name with special meaning.

How sad to have a weird name imposed on one, or even to impose in luckless youth one upon oneself -- names that will always strut and posture, stand between you and change, which means growth.

Hide rejoicing in the plain name.

*

Never give a child a name he has to live up to. Give a name to grow from, a name that is a comfortable refuge to fall back on, a calm anonymity from which one can dart out and make raids on reality.

*

Finally at the end of the morning (12 XII 05) I gave up and went to bed and pulled the covers over my head and tried to feel like me again, or somebody, at any rate. Even there in the snug dark, my head would keep spinning and my thoughts drift in and out of nescience.

Image as I wake: a prisoner or dying man chooses the mantra to say, and tries to follow it to safety. When one speaks the mantra, one speaks the way clear -- Bahnfrei -- one finds the path and clears the path at once.

Speaking my way through the jungle? No. Why? Because the mantra (unlike language) is the speech only of the Other. We can say it, but we cannot create it or change it. We do not know or wield the generative rules of that divine language, or is it the language of things themselves. We cannot make up sentences. We repeat, we do not manipulate.

Yet this repetition also changes -- changes us and changes to world.

Hence my Mindful Traveler muttering his way clear.

*

The body is our witness.

It is only when we are _seen_ that we can testify.

*

And the poet must bring his body with him to the poem.

And to the workshop.

*

But what more is a being to be?

To be is to will, says Nietzsche. To be is to want something, to be is to seek to induce change somewhere or in someone, if only in oneself. Yet there must be some sort of being beyond being, a knowing that knows, and means no alteration, just knows.

Now what is this being beyond being?

*

But is there anything worth inscribing that Egypt forgot? Only this: there is no Egypt now.

*

But why is coffee bitter today? What have I done?

*

A mild and lovely morning though. Yet I wake anxious, from sad dreams (see the poem "Medulla"), not enough sleep, yet I don't want to be where dream is, not today. Sun on the snow, sun on patches of brown and green where two mild days have things melting. The stream high. Mauve mums and pink roses on the table -- Dutch they look, she said, in their pale pitcher painted with another flower or two, also mauve.

*

The body of a woman one is in love with is a 'very special' substance -- its ionization pattern, its aura's 'discipline,' its electromagnetic field are all transformed, reformed, by love received. And this special-ness is available to, perceivable by, 'works with' only the person whose love effects those subtle but profound changes in her. So when one love a woman's body, it is not meat, not 'not just for my body,' though she may think it is. The body is the symbol, the living index of a special union that has already taken place in some domain immediately above our conscious awareness, and the lover years to engage in real space-time with what already is prefigured for him in her. For them. The contours of her flesh are the cherubim in the lover's temple. Her meat is god flesh.

I'm speaking of chemistry, not mysticism. (Not that there's a difference, but so many think there is.) If you can feel it, it's there. So far, you (the lover) are the best meter of it we have. But there could be others, subtler, less arguable, when the real science of Himerology reaches out to its destined technology.

*

Today I woke to the thickest fog of the winter, and it drew me, a kind of sensuous urge to be in it, move through it and see it, see the world through it from all the various angles and densities. Angles and densities = la vie terrestre.

Dark grey everywhere. I walked south along the river road to the pond where the beaver lives, and, instead of walking out onto the old dam, stood at the roadside (to which the water, so much water from snow melt and recent rain, almost reached) and watched the pond for signs of life. I kept getting distracted by ecological jive in my head, about how thick with reeds and grasses the pond was now, compared to the luminous sheet of water it was forty years ago. But those are thoughts unworthy of the moment, which was this water, the glorious tel quel of just this place, this now, luminous enough in fog, quiet, studded with odd growths and shoots that have as much right to existence as the bright vacancy I let myself -- just for a moment -- mourn. And this was beautiful. All round me the grey mist. Up to the north, up Cedar Hill, the fog was dark grey, but beyond the water, due east, the influence of the new-risen sun was speaking, the fog seemed no less dense in the bare trees, but it had light in it, and a hint of genuine blue, sky-blue's shadow or phantom, shimmering in and around the bare trees -- maples, elms, oaks, big ones, undisturbed for a century back there.

It's almost nine now, and by now the mist is usually fading into ordinary light. But today it seems to be holding its own. I love it.

*

Autoritratto: I have great fortitude but little courage. Can endure but not risk.

Or is it just the other way round, and I have whimpered tunefully all these years struggling through the immense wager of telling? Saying anything is taking chances.

*

Psyche's task: to name the trees from which this heap of wood chips, sawdust, bark mulch, comes-- identifying them by smell alone.

Such a heap, boy-high, on the road through Ruth Oja's plantation. No doubt left by the tree surgeons / tree assassins busy last week on the road. The smell of this pile, wonderful, pine and hemlock I thought I could tell, and something darker, less pungent, more receding--a hardwood smell?

*

Dull remark: if in a poem I use the preterit as an infinitive ('to went') to emphasize the aorist aspect of the preterit form, the act unbounded and unclocked, I would wind up suggesting instead an absolute pastness, where 'to went' would mean to go and never come back and that's the end of it. So maybe 'go' itself is our aorist, clocked by -ing in the laughable present or by -d (or strong preterit) in the lamentable past. No wonder there is no time -- there's hardly any anything. End of dull remark.

*

I was reading a list of Proto-Indo-European roots the way I do, and found the scholar Christopher Gwinn said 'empty' was **ken-* and later 'fresh or new' was **ken-* too. So new means to be empty of experience, to have room inside for new things. A young person empty like a shiny new bottle -- is that the sense built into our words?

*

Cross-cultural. The greatest of all cultural divides is between Now and Then. Dickinson's Amherst rhythms are as remote from Howe's as African weather is from Mackey's, or Genji's world from Miyagawa. Or my dream England from me. They are irretrievable, sensual, compulsive, unavoidable.

We cannot *choose* our otherness. The cross-cultural, like cross-dressing, chooses us.

*

Dream is paranoia, dreamers are paranoids. They think what they see in sleep pertains to them. It is as if you woke up remembering last night's Evening News, and imagining that all the events reported were about you or for you. Dream is the Deep Night News, and belongs to everybody, or nobody.

*

Lama holding the skin of big wildcat on his knees, good for his knees. Bobcat? Bigger it seemed. Lynx? He called it "yih" -- which I spelled in my head *dByi*, which the dictionary later gave for 'lynx,' also spelling it *gYi*. This fur is very healing for the knees, arthritis?

*

I have had enough of it,
this knowing so much and you not being there,

Un arbre attend,
mes yeux traversent l'épaisseur
de l'écorce, cette peau qui
efface la première histoire,

notre premier mot; squelette,
l'alphabet des os,
je lis dans les creux sombres

une maladie aveugle

He leans against the tree
he thinks, this is bark, when

it is thick it is cork

the cork protects

(but nothing protects the bones
from themselves
they go on being
hollow and very far)

he thinks of all the tunnels
the miles of hollow space inside his bones

a skeleton is made of dark highways
barely hidden by the pale chalk of the bone

but what is the blind disease
she read in the dark?

He thinks the blind disease
is feeling.

feeling along the bone walls.

And he too has a malady of the skin,
his skin is sick from being so far from hers.

*

Picture his confusion. He thought at first the words she was saying to him were the words he had been saying to her so long in the silence of his body never aloud. He roused to a sense that now she at last was saying that same feeling aloud to him. But then he doubted, reflected, and read a book, and found that the words were the words of another, that he had quoted, in another context, and she was saying now, without quotation marks, yet with the delicate saying/unsaying that question marks express.

*

There is truth in wanting, but you have to think it through, connect the dots.

*

There is truth in listening, but there are no guide ropes, it is easy to fall. So many dangers: the crevasse called silence; the fatal crevasse called understanding. The Mer de Glace of never understanding.

*

When you're good, you're excited: the voice's mind excited by what it hears itself saying.

*

Is it itself saying or another. You'll never know.

That's why it's important --according to my theoría-- to tell every single thing you see along the way.

*

The critic is a five year old child out riding with his mother and father. He reads out loud every sign they pass, pronounces the name of everything they drive by. Everything for which a name can be found in his experience, his tentative brand-new vocabulary.

Sometimes the name is wrong. Sometimes he calls an oak tree a pine tree. Sometimes he sees something and has no name for it, then it hurts him inside to be silent, so he says the name of something else, repeats over and over the last thing he knew how to say.

He is experiencing the drive very differently from the way his parents do. They are going somewhere, following the story of the road, going somewhere they have in mind. But for him it is an immense and gratifying ordeal, a ceremony of recognitions. His parents are mere readers; he is the critic.

*

On a fierce windy day one prays to the wind to be gentler. Was Job talking to the whirlwind, and surprised when a voice answered from inside it?

*

Is weather the only real news? Does it make us do what we do, as if there were millions of subtle mistrals, sciroccos, foehns that blow us along, warping our will, messing with our mood? Or mood, what we call mood, is just another weather, Dylan Thomas spoke of "the weather of the heart," and that's clear enough. Warping our feeble sense of what to do. Politics just another kind of barometer.

*

I DON'T WANT TO DO
WHAT I KNOW HOW TO DO

*

Eros / Euros. In Greek, Erôs means love, desire. Eurôs means decay, mould, rot. Strange that Euro-peans should call their money thus. Strange that love is so close to decay. Lust to dust.

*

The merchants carry sand in from the desert, and carry back from the city bags of broken asphalt pavement.

*

ImageS save from image. The wisdom of Catholic and Orthodox churches, and Tibetan lha-khangs, all full of images, many, many media, sizes, colors -- all of them instructive, stimulating to thought and practice and devotion, but no one of them obsessive-compulsive. We turn into all of them as we behold them, and so don't get trapped in one single one.

*

We can learn from any image.

And worship is a way of learning.

Identifying with what one sees, what one 'studies' in the image -- Blake says: "he became what he beheld."
And that is what faces the world. What faces us as the world.

*

Every time the devotee stares at an icon, a thang-ka, a statue, he enters Lacan's 'mirror phase' again, knows himself in the thing seen. And this mirror-phase heals from the first one, the infant tricked into self-identity. Now rescued from fixity. This is the real energy and beauty of iconolatry.

*

Poetry, like ancient tragedy, is a family matter. A family tragedy. The "family romance," says Freud, but the Greeks knew better. The pronoun family. Poetry is all about the antics and amours of I and you and me and she and they and he and him, their deaths and renaissances. And these relations constitute the formal geometry of the poem, the armature on which the events that are words are wound, the lines of sight along which meaning runs.

My poetry too is full of the pronouns and their tricks. Sometimes I think I would really like to meet the one whose name is "I" and the one whose name is "you." But most of the time I think I'm better off not knowing. Or knowing in fact that these are not persons at all, not the real me or the real you (if there are such creatures), but rather nodes of energy that come to inhabit the consciousness of the reader, and sometimes tell something true, or almost true, about the reader's self.

*

We focus on the "passion" of Christ, on the sufferings and death. We fail to focus on his passion in our normal sense of the word, the urgency he must have felt, the compelling will to make people as happy and functional as the bleak historical situation would allow, the compelling necessity to teach them something that would help them weather the brutality of their own genetic inheritance from the beasts, help them think their way, calm their way, into something clear. Something like mind. Like love.

I mean we forget _why_ he did what he did and said what he said, and remember only what happened to him -- as if the crushing of his life were his real gift to us, a cachet laid on human suffering. And there are holy men and women who have thought just that -- Therese de Lisieux, Edith Stein in our day. Could it be in fact that suffering is the discourse we have with God, the shared language Christ came down from Heaven to learn to talk with us, had to die in agony to learn that grammar?

But do we really think he came to us only to die? Why those silent thirty years, then those three eloquent years, if all he had to do was be savaged and crucified?

*

Passion Is Here it says all over the Olympic game venues. Even in this shabby commercial logo, the word still has some juice, some meaning we have to solve.

*

THREADS is a poem in thirty three sentences. The sentences were composed in obedience to certain formal and material constraints -- as usual, I prefer not to identify the constraints, preferring to sing in my chains, but not about them. Though happy to have the reader identify and empathize with them.

*

Most of my poetry arises, I guess, from lyrical observation or listening to words move around in mind; Threads though is different, is a little like the old "Texts" series (only some published here and there). Each of the thirty-three complex sentences in Threads arises from some historical or natural-historical fact -- thus [] rises from a postcard of the Hungarian Parliament triggering a memory that until 1830 deliberations in that parliament were conducted in Latin (to bypass the bewildering multiplicity of languages and dialects spoken in the kingdom). That passes for a fact in my book. Or in [], having seen a hammerkopje bird and its nest in the African exhibit at the Franklin Park Zoo I learned about its nest sharing habit. But less said the better.

*

"the kinds of love listen close along the skin. I lick the skin to find the mind, to lick, to tell time, climb the clock tower. Touch the bell. Rest my face in the running water that stands still, the dry water, the hidden river, the convex well. The presence it is you are flows through me and I become a consequence of your existence, feeble with absence, angry with a longing that won't let itself turn into desire. The grief of pothos instead of the ferocity of himeros. What is lost when one loves. What I lose when I love you." Find a speaker for these words.

*

Chiori Miyagawa's play: A very moving (in many senses) event, one that I'm still thinking about. What came through clearest are these things:

-- how strong and even beautiful the text is/was all by itself. I could (I'm used to doing this, of course) isolate it from its inszenierung (or whatever the english word is) and see it as on the page; it wd work as a poem, a recitation on the page, and nobody would feel it inadequate.

-- how generously (on the other hand) the text made itself available to the director's touch -- you teach me the text must be complete but still incomplete, finished but open-ended in some way, to let the genius of the director reinvent the genius of the writer.

-- and once that permission opens the door, the context of the text (Japan, US; then & now, the course of a young woman's living) allows the superimpositions of characters (the brilliance of having one woman play sister, stepsister, Prince Genji!), the opening to physical movement, balletic, to mime the passage of time which is so central to the meaning of the play, and then, of course,

-- the Bunraku! How marvelous that was, as if a specifically Japanese modernism rose to challenge our sense of body and presence ... how the puppet becomes more present than the live woman handling it, just as memory becomes an artifice that effaces the present.

*

What was I thinking when I began to think? Catch the first thinking of the day -- not (comme d'habitude) the image itself that greets the day, but the first thinking about it. Propositional. The propositional as oracle.

*

Another oracle: playing computer free cell on autoplay -- note the card that opens up the array, the key card that, played, suddenly wins the game. That card, mapped on tarot, tells.

*

I look at the image. It strikes home, slow or fast. I look a little, and then put it away or turn my eyes away. Now I have to let it sleep inside me.

I can't see what it is until I see what it becomes in me. Then I will be able to take it out and see it.

Looking and seeing are so different.

*

An ancient figurine, stiff and hieratic, except the tender, frightened eyes. A little wolf that lies in the hand. He is thinking: "Men are afraid of me, so I must be afraid." That may a little bit account for the sad or timid look in his eyes.

He reminds me of the little bronze or silver figures from Ancient Scandinavia, squat gods, bearded warriors with closed eyes, hard divinities to clutch in the hand. Soon the woman's hand will close around the wolf and he will sleep. And she will feel his wolf dreams slip up her arm.

*

I am still remembering from the first seeing. How moving this recalled image is: such fierce firm animal so small, so contained, waiting, timid even, held lightly, of its own weight, in such a soft hand.

Tomorrow I will look at it again, and who knows what I'll see.

*

In the Lebanese cafe. Flavored tobacco to smoke in the hookahs on sale all round. The flavors I could recognize or read: El Makhla was the common brand, and the flavors were banana, caramel, grape, rose molasses, mint, mandarin orange, cola, coconut, two apples. The other boxes were all in Arabic.

*

When you know only one language, you have to make that language somehow foreign, to go on.

*

Our eyes also are for saying goodbye.

*

The dead are ridiculous.

*

(It said that in my head as I was waking one morning.)

*

In fact the Roman Empire never ended. Latin passed into other tongues, one capital city gave way to another and another. Just as the newfangled Empire of Augustus preserved the old forms, dream-like, incoherent, but present: rex and consul and senator and aedile and all the rest, just in the same way we have never given up the imperium. Rome is eternal superimposition. The Protestant majority rules and represses science and human behavior with the same savage sternness they once rejected in the Roman church. They became another branch of the Roman church. And the emperor too takes on new titles, old Augustus new President. The differences turn out to be trivial. We might as well go back to Latin. Maybe the whole bad dream would blow away.

*

The Law has two enemies: crime and legislation.

Only so few of us there are who try to protect the Law from its subtler enemy.

*

The things that want us to know them. And the things that do not. Can't you just feel that, the difference, in the different things out around us? The things that want are waiting. The things that don't...what do they do? Are they hiding, or just repelling?

*

[old note:
Belief

Belief is the most terrible invention -
no Greek or Hindu or Buddhist
ever believed. They knew. Or they did

and let the doing be enough.
Cult and consciousness, poetry and praxis.
Nothing to believe in.

When did believing begin?
When did the individual's guess
at the Godness of the world
become an insistence that had to be defined,

when did intuition become conviction,
and conviction turn into control?

To believe is an angry imposition
of ego's guesswork on the other's world.

The terrible sin of belief.

So much terrorism, vengeance, simple murder,
all Holocaust
grounded on a system of belief.]

(I found these notes from May 2004 now in March 2006)

*

[old note:

Rimbaud's Illuminations and Kafka's later diaries are actually the same book, by chance written down by different men in different languages. Some translator should slip them into their original text, probably in Italian, then they would reveal their identity.

And we would discover the single author who wrote both

Then the angel said (for there are angels in this story, be aware, darling, be awed), "Choose any two books at (what you call) random and you'll find that they reveal evidences of common authorship. Shadows pass from text to text, whether we license them to do so or not. All we can do is watch, and try to take pleasure in their passage, and in the glints of community of person they reveal or suggest or almost conceal."

"But the Rimbaud and the Kafka really do fit together," I said, "not just any texts, these two, very special, saying two breaths of the same story, the systole and diastole of it."

The angel answered, "perhaps, perhaps." Angels are always saying perhaps. Then it said: "All we can do is watch. All we can do is take pleasure. All we can do is take pleasure."]

*

[old note:

allocentric

if the mind only could take the other as its 'own' center---
so that the center of this would always be there ---

this would divine us, deify, reify, make us kingly, thingly,
make us real.

(24 June 2004/Cuttyhunk)]

*

Autobiographies --- schools make you read Augustine, Rousseau, as if there were only one tradition (individualism learning to subordinate itself to God or State), But we should try to stretch, break free of that 'liberal' (house-slave) tradition and seek the balance of the other. When you read Augustine, you should read Apuleius too, also just like Augustine a Maghrebi beur, whose Apologia argues for soul against mind, for

magic against government. Or when we read Rousseau, we should lay beside his work the Autobiography of Edward Gibbon (they actually met meaningfully) -- an aged infant like Rousseau, but all acquisition and not dispersion. We need the balances. Canetti's huge and wonderful memoirs where the whole world sinks after a thousand pages into the face of his dead mother -- we need the people who turned away (like Canetti) or turned in (like Teresa of Avila) or turned against (like Emma Goldman). I wish Debord had written an autobiography,

*

The dreams we wake up with are not the same dreams we had or were having just before we woke. Waking is a sieve, not a passoire à connerie but a sieve that drains the wisdom out and leaves the bones.

*

The infanthood of genius. Instances of a certain kind of genius as arrested or eternal childhood, the everlasting Bright Child. Gibbon and Voltaire's *Fi, donc!*

People 'condescended' into the sexual -- Hor and Heva in the land, aged Adam unsexed.

This is just a hint to work on. Find instances of.

*

Numbers are always waiting.

*

If God is dead, they killed Him with their lies.

*

[answering Tom Meyer, who'd written about the link between consciousness and balance]

"the power . . . hides in the making" your 'reminded' poem earlier this week tells me, and that is told true. Seeing that statement -- you and I are about the only ones left who dare/care/are fool enough to make statements -- and isn't that the real shunt (or fall) from the poetics in which we were both raised? -- anyhow, seeing that statement fills me with joy, like daffodils coming up.

Balance. For you I'm a Virgo, but for me it is Libra, the only thing sign (and therefore not properly belonging to the Way of Living Creatures or Zo-diac) and things are balanced, a made or found thing, no matter, it has a balance in itself we gaze upon and envy.

The thing is consciousness in the sense that a thing thinks only one thing, all the time. So consciousness in our sense must mean (I'm following you here, I think) thinking of two things at one time, and holding them in balance, or weighing them for the privilege of your focused attention.

And sometimes I wonder if Libra isn't 'alive' after all. I have seen it sometimes as a her, a woman balanced in and on herself, Isis in fact, seated (as her glyph shows just her chair) -- and in that seating (no animal sits) Libra finds its balance between up and down, human and animal, lying and standing. A woman on a chair.

*

Psychologists speak dismissively of certain pleasurable dreams as mere wish-fulfilment, and teach us to dismiss them, oh that's just wish-fulfilment. Yet I think that wish-fulfilment dreams are likely the truest dreams we have. From them, from the exact detail, rhythm, timing, circumstance, cast of characters of those dreams, we can discern the actual name and nature of our _wish_. And most of us never really know what our wish is, the profound wish that tries to lure our life. Knowing your wish is close to having it fulfilled.

*

[writing about the paragraph above, to Tom:]

the whole question of what we are permitted to attend to by the prejudices of others and their superimposition on the self. The warp of consciousness is the greatest social fact -- perhaps it is the only real social (as opposed to physical, sensual, psychic) fact.

It seems so close to true this morning (put it down to the myriad blue squills all over the bright lawn), and in a darker sense teaches me how the Enemy works by making us doubt even our own dreams.

The Enemy that is no one, whose name is Everyone, and whom we speak of as 'they,' and yearn for their applause and good opinion. O the girls in the street!

*

[answering Birgit's letter of March 06:]

I just keep writing and writing. And then a long time goes by and I look back and find that what I have written is not writing. But at least it's written. The sluices (like the gracht and sluis system in Amsterdam) are still working, words flow in and out. So I write a lot, I try to write every day, and then I look back, I am always Orpheus looking back at my poems and killing most of them by my glance. Some survive, and those are the ones that other people get to see. Why I keep doing this? Partly because it's what I do, and man tut immer was er tut. Partly because I really believe it's a basic and almost-honest way of giving something back to the world that has fed me with so much beauty and sensation. Dumb answer, but I feel I write out of gratitude.

*

Pour it into language. It doesn't have to be right, you know. My father always told me that running water purifies itself in 100 feet. Language is like that too. Lies and mistakes and inadequacies all purify themselves as the language runs. Which is why we trust and love that beautiful old woman who rules us.

*

Proverbs:

Learn a language lose a friend.

*

Morituri, omnes. Not a feeling or a gloom, it's a part of the definition. Honey, we are syllogisms.

*

[from a letter to Lee Chapman about the layout of "Threads":]

The one thing that bothers me in a quick look is that line at the bottom of the page -- it makes me (who should know better) think that it means "end of poem."

Each time it would have that effect, I'm afraid -- perhaps (seriously) because the high tension of reading a poem is such that any reader is somehow, somewhere, secretly or otherwise anxious for The End, for the poem to end. That anxiety for conclusion is built into the nature of the lyric poem, the short poem, and we can't escape it. Poetry seems like a clash of Gertrude Stein's "writing wants to go on" with a kind of Aristotelian "the form wants closure" -- it may be the very tension that makes us love the delicate discomfort of the poem. Anyhow, that line at the bottom of the page sort of discharges the tension, just by visual cue.

*

the life of the small

*

woke writing this line: in the last days of mathematics

*

Hate weddings, love marriage: marriage enlists two people within each other; weddings enroll them in society. Weddings are the pre-emption of love --and all that can come from amative unity -- into the diversities of family. As ever, family (the footstep of society) is the enemy.

*

Knots, or not.

*

I'm trying to listen
but all I can do is hear.

*

I love foreign languages best, the warm presence of the breath without the impertinence of sense.

*

Part of my love of opera is that I hate knowing what they sing.

*

Think instead about the boundaries of my sleep.

*

Maybe the strangest thing of all is religion.

*

Artists are not famous and wealthy because people like to look at beautiful images but because people like to own things, collect things, invest in things.

Poets are poor because they produce no things. A poem is not thing enough.

*

I think too of the difference between having and experience and collecting one.

*

The strangeness of religion haunts me -- not superstition, or mysticism, or illuminating experience, or even magic: all those seem specific to individual human understanding and misunderstanding. But public cult, the shameless assertion of mysteries or of ethical banalities, the confident assertions of full knowledge of 'God's plan,' the whole diplomacy of heaven: these are very weird. And that people listen, congregate to be harangued, and join one another in belonging to something that has no existence other than their belonging itself. And that they call this smug belonging a belief -- whereas the cognitive process usually subtended by that word has nothing to do with what they feel.

And how strange all that is, strange as a lobster, or a pterodactyl.

That we do such things, and always have, and that in some ways it seems to get worse every year.

Yet in the midst of all the sects and triumphalists and fundamentalists and holy wars, somewhere, somehow, in that enigma we are used to calling the heart, some quiet Otherness sometimes takes hold, and lightens our experience, and consoles.

*

But why do I wake up puzzling about, bothering with such things? Bring everything back to personal experience. That has been our light since the caves.

*

Personal experience is the only value.

Personal experience articulated is the only history, only plausible theology.

(The Jews believed Moses' experience on the mountain. Everything flowed, flowered, from that.)

Hence the importance -- only truly preserved in Tibetan Buddhism -- of lineage. The uninterrupted transmission of personal experiences from one teacher to his disciple, and that direct transmission is a personal experience involving teacher and disciple both, and the latter then passes on his own experience, so inflected, later along. Buddhism is the 'only' religion which depends on this personal experience both for its authority and its individual practice.

*

Weather: the strange skin wrapped tight around all our experiences.

*

Syntax is where the meaning lives, but I learn words. Heaps of words.

That's always my trouble learning foreign languages -- I'm too good at vocabulary, lousy at grammatical patterns. I have all the words and no place to put them.

*

"When well sheltered, memories are reborn as rays of being, rather than as frozen shapes" Bachelard, Poetics of Reverie, p.135

*

After a day or so of fasting, after illness: how strange to chew, to have something in my mouth and have to deal with it. To eat 'normally' you have to forget you're eating. "Conscious reception of food" would be a challenge, unnatural, almost a sacrament. Every chew a contemplation.

Not just where each food comes from (the fields of barley, the men who planted it, the migrant workers men and women who tended it, reaped it, processed it, flaked it in some Christian mill down south, the crows that fed on the ears and the fallen, the beetles and weevils and nameless-to-me insects who ate around what I am eating, the thousand hands that one way or another sped it from the ground to me, here), not just all that is to be thought of, but how this mouthful links to all the food I ever ever eaten, links me to the earth and what, if ever anything, is beyond the endless procession of eating and eaten and eater, in that hazy but exhilarating vedantic calm where all three are one.

*

Think about (as above) 'to eat "normally"' and how that is different from eating naturally. Natural vs. normal. Our bleak house.

*

When you begin to notice your health, it slips away.

*

Health is like a shy deer in your forest -- leave it alone. Don't look for it or it will run away. Leave some salt on the lawn, some apples, and think about something else.

*

Titles for some collected works: Amatum iri (to be about to be loved, future passive infinitive)

Amoris tenus (all the way to love, as far as love)

*

Dreamt ca. 8:10 AM, 17 May 06: [someone is reading a letter out loud to me; after some vague expression of sorrow, he reads:] "Giorgio Agamben died this morning, from no apparent cause or reason. Alive for nearly 63 years, he liked everything and liked everyone, and had no enemies..."

Verbatim. I hope not.

*

(notes responding to Patrick Tesh on Wilde:)

Language as erogenous zone is not an altogether new idea, but bless you if you can show how it actually works.

What erectile tissue does an elegant adjective stimulate? And yet it somehow does.

Isn't the strangest phrase of all, "to have sex" with someone? Such a telling phrase. To have sex you first have to have a sex. And then the problems begin.

But if (following Freud and all our own experiences) there really is such a thing as infantile sexuality, then sexuality has nothing to do with sex, not the sex you have one of, not the sex you have with another.

Why do we call this thing that infants have, and we all have, "sexuality" when it precedes any and all function or self-awareness as a sex?

This thing that must be an energy all of its own, and only one of its ventures or deployments is what we call sex.

Sex is such a strange word. Such a strange work.

*

"who is Frank Moore"

I thought of that yesterday and said it out loud, and marvel at the capacity of Olson's poem to come to rest significantly on that question -- without it ever having excited in me a real curiosity about its answer. Charlotte asked me, who is Frank Moore? and I said I had no idea. It never mattered -- but why doesn't it matter? How can the very particular on which the poem alights be so particular as to elude our ordinary sense of specification? Not the answer but the kind of question it is, that's what mattered.

Do we (or did I, all these years) take it as a mere (but effective) signifier of Ordinary Civic Uncertainty, the mysteries of neighborhood by and on which our lives are shaped? The very question is its own answer. That he (Olson speaking) doesn't know is the point, a point we share by not knowing either. Holy Ignorance. Standing with the poem in dubiety, sharing it.

*

Unwanted Poster

*

The Calico or Petticoat Wars.

They didn't wear calico to ape women's clothes, as their enemies and their paid historians mocked. They wore calico because it was the cloth the Indians were sold to wear. Indians wore calico, so they, the oppressed and dispossessed, wore calico to assert, or maybe just discover, common cause with the Indians, the dispossessed and oppressed people par excellence before them. Calico was the mark of a subject people (and hence of women too) -- subject to the tyranny of kings, companies, white men, great landlords who "owned" by gift of the Crown lands the king had never seen, and the "owners" never worked. The myth of ownership is a bare lie, a thin tissue of deception. A kind of calico.

*

thinking about marginalia to _Fire Exit_ -- these marginalia are the author's guesses -- not about what the words mean, and certainly not what he or she intended or had in mind when writing them down-- but rather intimations or shadows or even straightforward (it could be) pictures that come to his or her mind later, when reading the lines already somehow written down.

(For a bossy and demanding man, I certainly make big claims to planlessness...)

So in the passage marginally identified as Canticum Adae, the Canticle of Adam, it happens as the author midway through the writing down of it that it felt to him that Eve's husband was speaking, was (even) tossing such words to and fro still in his great genital mind.

*

Midrash on Pantagruel:

Obesity is a distorted quest for knowledge.

If there were more intellectual content (=nutrition: names, facts, faces, touches, tones, relations, functions, numbers, arrays, architectures) in elementary education, childhood obesity would be eliminated. Now education is all discussion and no feeding -- keep the mind empty. But they are children, they are hungry -- a vast, oceaning hunger for everything. If they can't satisfy it in the classroom they'll run ravening to the coin machines for the fastest hit of input. They are children, we can't expect them to analyze their appetites precisely, parse their hungers. Give them data and procedures, facts and skills, and they won't rush to junk food. The intense taste of junk food is information. Sensory input is information, is feeding. Make sure the child's sensorium is charged with real nutrition.

If you keep the kid busy from 9AM to 3PM, busy at busy work, what can you expect but gluttony from 3:01 PM to bedtime? _Activity doesn't feed_ -- don't waste the child's time and health on 'classroom activities.' Famished animals rush to their feed. Any feed.

*

Theater of the Speaking Body:

all the words [of the play, the text] are recorded, then replayed loud while the actors move. They may mime speaking, or they may act athwart the sounded words.

*

(speaking of Tom's Interventions and my current long poem in tercets):

We have discovered the right to have voices speak and be answered without the inconvenience (or sometimes even the possibility) of identifying them. In that sense, we are more in Hell than Dante let himself be, with his firm grasp on the identities --since, as C.Williams points out, that is all the poor shades have-- of the damned, For us, I suspect, the voice is the core of identity, while for Dante's time it was only a blason or emblem of one's ipseity.

*

the constant upwelling of physical energy flowers into meaning, gesture and word, sound and movement. Move in the world the way thought does, ever noticing, ever responding.

*

You ask me about voices -- you say about yours "my writing voice took on something close to my speaking voice in order to stay honest" and then you ask me: "what are the differences in voices for you?" Bless you for asking -- no one ever has, so I hadn't known to think about it myself. (I love questions, I think you know that, always ask me, anything, even things you know I don't know --- questions are great, because while if I ask you or you ask me, though you and I may not know, the answers know, and sometimes the answers find our mouths to speak themselves with).

My voices. This is what you made me think:

Voices. I think the writing voice and the speaking voice are very close, almost the same. The writing voice came first, in one sense. I was a child very alone, but never felt lonely. What I yearned for were names, to know the names of things and places and people and conditions. Every name is a name of power. I would read a word or hear a word (elm, alley, shoeshine) and need to know it in the world. Is this an elm? Is that an elm? I'd ask until I coupled the thing with its word. This is an early form of making love: the conjoining of thing and word.

When I say the writing voice came first, of course I spoke before I wrote. But I cannot remember learning to read. It seems as if I always read. So in a way, the writing voice and the speaking voice are 'dialects' of the reading voice. The voice I heard in my head, reciting from a book. And then, later, not from a book at all, just reciting from circumstance alone, summoning the names and pronouncing them.

It sounds so insincere. But I'm not insincere. The ordinary colloquial may be quick, but it is not really sincere -- the colloquial is always a quotation, prompt or tardy, from something someone else said. The colloquial in other words is always the Other speaking, not the real self of the speaker, a self that lurks hidden behind the conventional spoken language.

But to be sincere is to speak out loud the language you hear in your heart -- that's a reasonable definition, isn't it?

Why is it so hard to speak any language? Only years and years of English "immersion" let me speak this one. And when I speak, I usually am speaking from an inner teleprompter where my words-about-to-be-spoken are composed, by me, usually, but sometimes they just appear. But when I say teleprompter and appear, I don't mean visually appear -- I just know the words, not seeing them, not exactly hearing them, some other way. And when they are composed, they find their way to my mouth. It really does feel that intricate and difficult for me.

Because I want to be sure the words are true, and really make sense, make sensuous, make a new sense, a new direction. Why otherwise speak?

Of course: Two reasons. I speak because you ask. Or I speak because I want. These are the two ethers or metals of alchemy: responding/demanding. I speak my way to getting what I want -- that primitive sociological use of language -- 'sincere' it may be, but only as sincere as our desires are.

*

Are your desires sincere, you who never speak of what you want, you who always seem to be in bed with the moment?

*

There is this business now of shaking people out of my story. Simplifying or at least changing the Dramatis personae. I don't need the plangent daughter of the exiled black sheep rightful heir. I can get rid of the Kapellmeister who plays any tune the dullest crowd wants to hear. I need quicker, sprightlier comrades, faithfuller retainers.

*

years ago, the first time the New York Times asked me to review a book for them (I have reviewed a fair number since), I warned them that I would not write a mocking or attacking review; if I could not write a positive essay on the book, I wouldn't review it at all. I felt that writing, literature, has enough trouble without writers taking easy shots at other writers. I said that was my religion. To my surprise, they accepted my attitude, I mention it now because the only critic (I am not a critic) who ever seems to have had the same religion was Blanchot. His writing on writers is marvelous, sympathetic, empathetic even, and as he writes about someone, that someone seems all at once the most interesting writer in the world. He does two things that move me: he writes about an author as if he were the same as the sum of all his works (Blanchot slipping from work to work or poem to poem for the evidence he uses to invoke the writer he's discussing), and he never attacks them or dismisses them. He knows as well as we do that not all books are good and not all texts by an author are as good as his others -- but that's not his business. His business is to find the good in what is there. That makes Blanchot more than a critic, it seems to me, and the way his work has been received makes him more of a philosopher, an honest man in search of the truth of other people, other people one by one.

*

As Logothete of the Republic of Great Antillia, it behoves me to admit, even boast, that one terrain can be claimed and should be claimed by many different polities or governments. What is important is once and for all to detach the concept of State from the concept of Land. Every country is Occupied Palestine.

So without infringing on the rights and prestiges of the United States, conceived of as an armed executive with compliant pre-approved regional representatives discussing affairs in congress, there should also exist, in this New England, the unarmed government of Great Antillia, the Mormon Kingdom of East Cumora, the Orange Kingdom of New Netherlands, The Wappinger Confederation, the Pequot League, and many more. All of them interwoven, superimposed and underachieving, glimpses of magic and truth shimmering through the trees and shopping malls. From the American flag we borrow the white of the stripes and the white of the stars for our own banner, white to the point of transparency. Enlightened Deedlessness, Transparent Cowardice, the world with a broken mirror.

*

Surrounded as I am by woodlands and open space, I still miss parks, the multum in parvo of them, all of nature compressed into a square block or two, the false mountain of les Buttes-Chaumont, the marvellous sweep of the gardens in Hannover, the Golden Gate in Shallow Sunset, Washington Square in Paradise.

*

Zakhor. Remember, spoken to the Jews. But the Black Americans have nothing (in that sense) to remember. Nothing but grief. Their past is their present.

Imagine the Jews without Exodus, desert, manna, promised land, crossing over Jordan. The Black American has only the expulsion from Eden (Africa), a Captivity without Esther, without Mordechai. The Black Americans are still in Egypt. What fearful thing will rise when some prophet dares to say to them: Remember!

*

I finally got the novel finished -- it came in a little over 300 pages, so it's not quite the stripling I had thought. But it's good, and I'm happy, and it ends with something that totally surprised me -- but will not, I think, surprise the reader at all.

*

The faery kingdoms of America: to be discovered. Or perhaps, unfound, in fact inhabited. West of Brittany to Britain. West of that the line still runs, the Green Line. I have seen them tall and quiet in the midst of Massachusetts. And the sun comes out now on my lawn to make it green as Donegal and tell me I'm right.

They're here.

They're immigrants like us. All the folk of lust and wisdom travel west with Lady Grian, west with what you call the sun.

*

There are two kinds of ambition an artist can have, and they can get terribly in the way of each other. Caution. There is the ambition _to make art_, and the ambition _to be someone who makes or has made art_. They are fiercely different.

The making ambition is directed to, and largely satisfied by, the conception and enterprise and completion of a particular work: poem, installation, film, sculpture, novel, painting -- doesn't matter the scale. And then the slow development of the more or less systematic year by year articulation of a body of work.

The being-someone-who ambition is directed to, but can never wholly be satisfied by, public presence and perceived identity. The being-someone ambition can never be satisfied in the artist because it does not depend on the artist's own genius, energy and sense of the work at hand or just done. It depends on the accidents of reception. And all too easy is it for the artist to essentialize these accidents or obstacles, essentialize them and internalize them as if they had something to do with him or his work, rather than the vast intricate network of social, economic, erotic, political, racial and so forth forces that every art work is launched into.

Now I happen to think that these two ambitions have a lot to do with how we get on with other people, other artists. The making-ambition leaves one relatively placid in the face of other artists' successes and recognitions. Not so the being-ambition -- the success of the other diminishes and humiliates the self.

There is no way of avoiding that. The being-ambition is destined to eternal humiliation, no matter how successful the artist becomes. The success of the other will always hurt, weaken.

So the solution my sense and my practice both suggest is to focus more and more, madly, purely, blindly almost, like the great crazies, focus on the work to be done,

turn the being-ambition utterly into the ambition-to-make.

And leave the rest to chance, karma, impulse, chaos, your enemies and friends -- who work as hard as you do to help or hinder you.

In the work itself, only itself, to focus the ambition. It cleans one of humiliation (the artist's life is so full of them) and of false desire, leaves one free for lust and love, the true Eros which aims its arrows at real targets- - the beautiful person of the other, the beautiful work on the page or screen or wall. *„Arbeit, heilende Welle, in dir bade ich mich rein_*, cries Dr Faust (Busoni's version)-- and those words stay with me. Stay with us.

And it's never a choice between the work and love. Love cooperates with actual making. It's only the other ambition that love, loving, love affairs, can inflect, affect, hurt -- or help.

So much for the rational. By my instinct: I feel sure that people (even publishers, galeristas, impresarios, producers, editors) can tell the difference, can sense the two kinds of ambition in an artist. When they feel the ambition-to-make, they spontaneously, unconsciously try to help out, try to put their scant or ample 'inertia' moving in the service of the work -- just as people normally, decently, try to help out a stranger doing something difficult and important, or just some petty thing where help is called for, or stand by making helpful remarks (they hope).

On the other hand, when people feel an artist is thick with that ambition-to-be-someone-who, they just as instinctively veer off. Repelled by the self/ishness of the other, the self-involvement instead of work-involvement, they keep their distance. They feel like prey at that moment, and turn cautious, reserved -- as we all do when comparative strangers clearly want something from us.

Difference: between making and being on the make. Our (holy) words tell it clearly enough, as usual.

*

Ireland is (as far as I know) the only land with two different populations, one for the most part invisible to the other. These two -- the Sidhe and the Human -- co-inhere in land, in landscape, in river and fort and hill. The town (baile) is supposed to be Human, but They are there too. And in their own holy places -- the bare slopes of Muckish, say, or Erigal -- the Sidhe summon humans to crisis. Decisions to be made, weddings and emigrations. The Sidhe stay, always, we pray, stay, though so many Erin-leavers beg them to travel with. And maybe, please the Good, maybe some of them have yielded to the entreaties of lovely women and fine men off in the morning to Philadelphia, maybe some of them came too. Please the Good that America too will be a land of the Sidhe.

*

Now that there are twice as many speakers of Polish in Ireland as there are speakers of Irish Gaelic, it will be up to the Sidhe to make Irishmen of them, and illuminate whatever language they think they're speaking with the special language of this special world, the Good People's own inflection that tinges the accent of all those who grew up in Ireland or where Irish speakers spoke to them. Just as the Sidhe made the Fomorians and the Firbolgs and the Cro-Magnons and the Tuatha De Danann and the Continental Celts all of them, then the Danes and Norwegians and Spaniards and Englishmen and Normans into Irish, made them speak, whatever they thought they were speaking, a language that the rest of the world knows is Irish, so the Sidhe will make them Irish speakers too.

*

The astonishing history of poetry in America, where almost every poet has been in one way or another against the government. Is that Romantic, maudit, stance itself the genesis of the social and political inefficacy of poetry in America? Whitman loved Lincoln, but who loved Wilson, Roosevelt, Eisenhower? They were in some way great presidents (= presid-ed over major praxis in the world) but what poet rose to bless them?

Yet in Europe there is a tradition (inherited by Latin America) where the poet can not only befriend the government, but actually take some part in it. Milton was Cromwell's 'secretary of state,' Goethe in effect was the prime minister of the Duke of Weimar, The Renaissance poets of Italy were hand in glove with the rulers of the republics. In our century, Claudel, St. John Perse, Paz were ambassadors. Poets have been ministers of state in Bosnia, the Czech Republic, Nicaragua. In classic China, poets were the government.

Here our only connection is the Government Grant we lobby for and squabble over. The government awards paltry prizes, annual laureateships and the like, to poets safe enough to endorse.

And lo! it is not the government's fault. We are at fault, we who (like Pound) took our political energies and savvy and conscience and paideuma overseas, we who content ourselves with penning potshots at the Pentagon, and getting famous for chanting poems against this or that to college audiences.

*

Does the poet finally have to assent, consent, to being a _representative_ human? Must the poet, that is, assent to the high --but self-denying-- task of being a representation of humanity in eternity? Who has the haughtiness and the humility both for that assignment?

*

Into every person's life a Christ enters at some moment.

Always in human form. To recognize him for what he is, within the garments of his or her seeming -- that is the crisis. Then to 'sell what one has' --give up the conventions of one's ideas -- and follow Him.

*

I remember once trying to learn Irish Gaelic -- which as far as I know no member of my family had spoken for five hundred years, if at all -- and somehow the turns of grammar (not so much the sounds), the deep structure of the language began to haunt me, and give me strange dreams. And I have certainly dreamt in German, though not in recent years.

Or is it German? Maybe it is a special unknown language of dream, Althochtraumisch, that we all speak and forget in the moment of waking, carrying only the shadows of in on our ordinary speech. And confuse it with some other tongue we think it might be, Gaelic, German, Greek...

*

(writing to Tom Meyer, 22 IX 06):

those are the kindest words any work of mine has ever heard, and coming from you all the more so. You've made me happy. Talk about blessing!

It makes me suddenly aware that one way you and I (and some others, wonderful others) are alike is --this is tentative, forgive me if I get it crooked-- when you are actually inside the world, inside the making (as in poets as makars), then you can move to any place on the circumference with equal ease. Why you can move

from the ardent center to Jyotish or Lao Zi or Musa Puerilis or Wortcraft with equal grace and equal skill. To be at the center! There we somehow are! No wonder we live a bit obscurely, hidden by the world we master. Occulted. Though Goethe, one of our company who has been much on my mind lately, was the least hidden of all. Hmm. Must think more of how he dealt with the veils. I think perhaps he was close to the exact center of the sphere of event, the Action, while the best of the rest of us are to one degree a little closer to one part of the earthskin than another...

*

Humans -- perhaps all beings -- wield two identities. One in 'eternity,' one here and now. To make them one is the soulmaking Keats offered as our business in this vale.

To see the one in the other is the high silent art of the teacher, the guide.

*

Mystical: said of a real experience that is shy of words. That might be spoken but should not be spoken. The mystical can be explained or described, but it ceases to be mystical then, the wordless experiential language of the mystes, one who keeps silence (myei) or is silenced by the mysteries.

*

Crane. When he came east to the City Joe Kling helped him find his sights as a reader and a writer. When he left any city, those preposterous islands killed him.

*

dream: I am holding a thick book called the Fiendish-Yinnish Dictionary. And in the dream I smile, recognizing this as a kind of Joycean version of a French-Yiddish bilingual dictionary. Then in the dream I begin to analyze the dream: Yinnish is the language of Yin, that is, of the feminine, of women. In the dream I laugh: a woman's dictionary would have each entry word on a separate page, so a woman can tear out the words she doesn't like. Women are rulers of language. I get serious now in the dream. Language belongs to women: they can accept it or reject it.

Waking, I wonder why Fiendish? Am I the fiend whose language has to be translated into the words of women, so they will understand me? Accept me, o don't reject me? What makes me a fiend? Fiend is the English version of German Feind, the enemy.

Later, I notice that in the dream I did not open the dictionary. Was the discovery that there were two languages, where I thought there was only one, too big a shock?

May I learn to speak Yinnish! It's not too late.

*

Being in love: selfishness and ingratitude and greed: no gratitude for all that the beloved has already given or conferred; anger at the beloved for not giving more. Always wanting more.

In fact, one could say that Being in Love is the total cathexis of all the Five Poisons: anger at not getting more; desire for more; ignorance of the impermanent and changeful imputed identity of self and beloved, her 'uniqueness' and one's own; jealousy of all kinds; envy/invidia towards all her connections.

Being in Love, then, is the total sin.

And like all sin, exciting. Perhaps most exciting of all.

Which says something about excitement. And about sin.

*

You were going to Ireland, perhaps to be learning Irish there, certainly visiting some special places there, a forest even, and hills. You were in a good mood about it, and we chatted happily as boys. Only one thing worried you: you had been given a mantra to say and the obligation to say it. It worried you, how could you perform that daily obligation and still do all the things in Ireland? Should you put off your trip? I asked how long you had to recite the mantram every day. You said: three hours a day. You wrote with your fountain pen the mantra in question: OM HRI HRI HRI... is how it began, a Manjusri mantra surely. You wrote in red ink, the Tibetan characters, clearly, syllable by syllable down the page. There were perhaps eight syllables -- it was not the usual Manjusri mantra. I was surprised that you knew the Tibetan characters. One of them I thought you drew incorrectly, but I said nothing about it. I was happy for you, and cheered you up, explaining that Of course you must go, and of course you could say the mantram -- it was only three hours a day, and you could learn to say it by a process of conscious uninterrupted rippling emission. We walked outside at that point as I explained. We were walking west beside the white moonlit mansion I was living in. Do you remember Franny and Zooie, I asked, and of course you did, and you began to intuit what I was going to tell you. I explained about the Prayer of the Heart, the Jesus prayer, and about the hermit who walked all over Russia and Podolia (I insisted on Podolia in the dream, even though uncertain where or what Podolia was) his life long just repeating the Jesus prayer until his whole breath and body and mind were filled at all times with that conscious prayer, so everywhere he went and everything he saw was always fresh and new and clean around him, seen with his clean mind that never stopped its prayer. . At first I thought it had snowed, though the night was mild. I bent down and picked up what I thought was snow -- it was light, fluffy seed or grain or pollen. (Writing about it now, I think: it was manna.) As I was explaining to you what the actual words of the Jesus prayer were, I began to cry, really cry, with copious tears, as I recited: Lord Jesus Christ, Have Mercy on me, a Sinner. The tears surprised us both, but neither of us referred to them. We had come by now, deliberately on my part as it seemed, to a little set of stone steps leading down to the cellar of the building, which, though the rest of the house was dark, was lighted enough for us to see that just inside the door there was a little shrine-like place, in pale wood like pear-wood, a door with a cut-out of a double-armed cross in it, and a small dark space behind the door. I gestured down, and told you that I kept my copy of the book down there. We could feel the influence of it streaming up the steps to where we stood still outside in the night. You said, jesting gently, Careful! that book is loaded.

[deam. 21 X 06: the you I'm addressing seemed to be or be like George Q at the beginning and the very end, Ken Irby in the middle (from fountain pen to cellar door)]

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In autumn, the leaves turn red and yellow -- they color the light anew with organic earth light, which sinks into the ground and grows there as gold and jewels. Jewels and gold are species of light built by the compression of sky. Gold is sunspill as shaped by autumn trees. Millions of years.

Hence Ratnasambhava (Rinchen Jungnas), Buddha of Abundance and Wealth, is shown yellow -- not of gold, but of what gold comes from.

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THE THREE RELIGIONS.

Stone. Tree. The Third.

Stone:

This is the oldest, and has never died. It tries to replace all other religions as they come along; it turns them into different styles of the Stone Religion. All the new religions as they come along try to escape from the stone.

So Christianity, which began with Christ the carpenter, the shaper of wood, climbing the tree on the top of the hill. He climbed the tree into the sky. And after his death, he was reborn: and rolled away the stone. That is, he rejected the stone religion, rolled it away so we could grow upright and tall, trees in the light. Though Christ pushed the stone away, it was Petros, the rock, on which the church was built. Christ said: Which of us, if his child asks for bread, would give him a stone? But the Church gives the child no bread, only a marble Vatican.

So Islam, which begins with weightless night journeys into the Realm of Truth, Mohammed's visionary presence, the voice that speaks the Koran in him. But Islam is diverted, overwhelmed by the stone religion, becomes an idolatry of the Ka'aba, the obligatory pilgrimage, the stoning of the devil --as if stone were the holiest of things and could drive out evil. Dome of the Rock.

And in Buddhism, there are tendencies, Zen is one, where the meditator seeks to become immobile, thoughtless, impervious, steady as a rock. The Zen meditator is taught to be rigid as the beautiful boulders in the monk's garden.

Tree.

Tree is the new religion. We are wrong when we think back to Druids and Dodona and smile about Tree Worship of the ancients. Tree worship hasn't happened yet. In Muir and Thoreau, in Keats and Pound and haiku and Mallarme we begin to see the lovely liturgy of the tree beginning. A tree bends, sways in the wind, is solid but not rigid, is full of flowing sap and architectural uprising, but stands its ground.

Tree hasn't happened yet. Maitreya will stand up from his chair -- already a chair is a halfway house, something built of wood to hold one off the ground. Not crouching on the earth like a stone but sitting motionless upright, like a tree. Chairs show the way. The chair gave the western world its political preeminence and military authority. We are as powerful as our chairs -- throne, cathedra of the bishop, fauteuil of the Academie, chair of the professor, the driver's seat, the catbird seat. Because the chair, which is made from trees, is like the tree, halfway to the sky.

And when it reaches all the way -- Christ tried to show it, climbed the tree, went to heaven.

Zaccheus climbed a tree

His Lord to see

we said when we were children-- Zaccheus was the founder of the true Christianity, the one that even now has hardly begun to be born.

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What haunts me are the ethical (and theological) issues of voir giving way to dire. As long ago as Thucydides, history becomes amenable to spin -- how we make sense of what we think happened to us. Where it came from and what it means. But the meaning of the Holocaust is precisely where we cannot stand, cannot even enter. Hier gibt's kein Warum might be truer even than Levi knew. That is the mystery, the tremendum.

And the dire part worries me because Deconstruction can work hand in hand with Historical Revisionism (to give the Deniers a polite name), as we see when Chomsky leaps to the aid of Faurisson. It is not just Chomsky's irritable courage or his defense of free speech that's operative here, but something deeper: a

profound a/nomie of language, a vast a/morality of speech. If speech is free in that sense, then (the by now familiar, almost orthodox, sense of) Memory as a Construction comes to depend entirely on the will (free, good or otherwise) of the constructors.

Think of those moments in Shoah when the seemingly nice friendly Polish peasants are remembering, recalling lost Jews fondly, etc., but little by little slip into those very attitudes (whether violent or passive) that marked them during the destruction of the Jews. How readily a skilful film editor could take those and hundreds more hours of reminiscences and _dire_, and gradually build up a vision of a healthy East European world in which the Nazi incursion was a mere episode, unfortunate indeed for the Jews but unpleasant for everybody. The Holocaust would vanish _into_ history (the way Spiegelman notoriously makes it vanish out of history).

How smart Lanzmann was to show the bleak places left over from the actual: the physical evidence of the results.

Think, on the other side, of that film where in the present time the rememberers are old and unappealing Jewish women, loaded down with tasteless costume jewelry and sitting in expensively tasteless living rooms. There is nothing appealing about them at all except their stories, and their stories are given the lie by the picturing that is being done. The vileness of that strategy offends me still -- to make the truth tellers ugly, tasteless and old. How seriously can we take their complaints? They _look like_ grouchy grandmas kvetching about their ungrateful children. The stories they are telling are vast and terrible and full of awe -- but the image undercuts the words every time.

Here the truth told is weakened by the presentation -- and the lie told can be strengthened by presentation too. What frightens me is the Deconstructionist project reaching into history, this history, a world and time I actually lived through (in ignorance mostly), the project privileging all construction of memory equally. The Polish peasants have their memories, the Jews have theirs -- and the Holocaust vanishes into the contradictions of human report and judgment.

I think of that strange Israeli rabbi who argued that the six million Jews lost in the Holocaust, and the millions of others who suffered, were somehow the reincarnations of (or descendants of?) those who worshipped the Golden Calf in the desert (or some other big Biblical crime, I forget), and that their sufferings were a punishment, presumably deserved, that had been waiting 3000 years to afflict them. What a desperate maneuver! And yet one can almost sympathize with him -- not for his lack of empathy or even decency, but for the crazed desperation with which he had to come up with something to explain it, something to make sense of it -- otherwise God and Torah and history are just three names for blind chaos. Kein Warum.

Even his arguments could be drawn into a 'construction of memory' Which makes me want to go back to memory itself. We think: of course it is a construction. But then one construction is as good as another, as long as it tells the truth we want told.

*

from Vasily Grossman's _Vse techet_:

"He went through the Hermitage -- to find that it left him cold and indifferent. It was unbearable to think that those paintings had remained as beautiful as ever during the years in camp which had transformed him into a prematurely old man. Why hand't the faces of the madonnas grown old too, and why hadn't their eyes been blinded with tears? Was not their immortality their failure rather than their strength? Did not their changelessness reveal a betrayal by art of the humanity which had created it?"

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The twists of circumstances (Circe's Dances) ((un-dances)) that fetch us close or far to one another, all. President Street of then and of now, of who one was and who one is.

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I've been writing through the Mozart piano concertos. Hearing the music hard, but not listening to it, writing through it, as if writing were a way of seeing through the gorgeous cloud of sound to the world / story from which the cloud is billowing. Hearing, but let writing replace listening.

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I think of plays I would write, and remember Crichton's wonderful cave work. The tinkling china teacup as the boy's hand trembled and made cup rattle on saucer -- a marvelous mapping of the nervousness of the actor onto the nervous of the character projected. I still remember that micro coup-de-theatre, that's the way to go: the way theater in real time can shatter the defenses round the heart, can make us really present, through the accident of only here, only now.

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The sound of footsteps pounding up the stairs -- the Black & Tans arriving, some O'Casey play, Juno?, at the old theater on McDougal Street, 1951. The sound is what stays in mind all these years, the real time sound of where one actually is now -- sharing the sound-space with the actors, hence, with the action, the history, the meaning.

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