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The evidence is scattered—
a skull here (who knew him,
a man by the size of it?)
some odd birds over there
and squirrels everywhere
remorseless as rats. Try
to love what happens.
Try to figure out the algorithm
brought you to this very place.
Numbers really can explain
everything, believe me, so
many numbers and each one
loves you in its way. Imagine
if when you were young someone
said Arithmetic would love you—
but so it is, the meaty coils
of her caress are all around you
and you love it. You love
tying her in knots and watching
her struggle free. Then she
multiplies before your eyes
and is all the population you need,

sands of the Negev, seed
of your seed. Now weigh
the skull, and now (here's
something easy) count
the squirrels, yes numbers
can be used to count with,
not just thinking. There
they are, grey ones and red ones
(his name was John).

8 August 2010

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The crows tell me when

and then

and then I listen

soft to stand

under what they say.

8 August 2010

RICORDANZE

The things that beesting minds
(East River bottle-green a-day
a rat in Shakespeare
and most of all the cow that looked at me)
(have you been good to your mother?
and I never was, not enough)

first hurt, hard, then swelling and burning
later a long itch, the special
pain called healing
(does it end? the bee flies away and dies
mortally wounded by her job
her stern reminder)

Say you're sorry to the cow

I am sorry I thought I was a flower
and you a bee but you're too big
but your big brown eye
all soft and wet enters me anyhow
like the sting of your sister Miss Bee

but I wasn't a flower not a recollection
not the gorgeous dew-drenched hortensias
my mother brought up from the garden
to fill the big blue and white Chinese vase

vahz we said in those days, not vayss
and that's a prick of conscience too
the way the sound of a word
lingers big in the mind

the way my mother said batt'ries
for the flashlight, said chúnafish
for those Sabbath suppers—
the sound went right in and stays
and what could I do but hear them
and what can I anyhow ever do what listen?

9 August 2010

NO

Why the sound of someone saying No
is like an eagle soaring.
No is always ready for more
while yes is stuck in the familiar, the possible.
Stuck in the suburban lawn or timeless rock.

But No is free and can survey
all the foolish yesses is their silly dresses
sick with fixation, sick with getting what they want.

No is Spirit and yes is flesh,
not the nice kind that joins with other people
but the kind that lies dead on the plate and you eat it
so people of spirit look at the steak and say No.

9 August 2010

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Ixion's wheel
is everybody's clock.

Bound to an illusion
of repetition
we measure the measureless

using beautiful numbers
that have real lives of their own

but we make them units to torment us.

9 August 2010

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The skin went away in the night.
The heart, suddenly much closer
to the things of this world, closed
the book it had been reading
all these years. Looked up,
out, paused, smiled. The heart's
man all round it swooned.
He and his heart had a dream together,
something about wives and children
weeping by his bed, something
about clergymen and candles,
then nothing much. And this
was the best part of the whole dream.

10 August 2010

ENCOMIUM ISIDIS

The glow of light on an empty chair.

Someone was here
someone will be again.

Every chair is perilous,
every chair a throne.
A chair goes against nature.

When the Egyptians show their queens
seated on thrones or blocks of stone
they mean us to understand
that the female intelligence and wisdom
embodied in the pharaonic theology
transcends nature. Death
is nature's last act against us.
Then theology takes us and brings us
far and by night to the truth beyond nature.

10 August 2010

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Barbarians on wet feet
side through the piazzas.
They leave sea marks
wherever they go. Wise
natives look the other way
but children stare. They
wish they had wet feet too.
Alas, some of them will.

10 August 2010

EPINIKIAN

We celebrate athletes
because earth is so inept for us
and everything is hard.

Gravity, the plenitude of salts
that keep us from drinking the sea,
brutal deserts, murderous snows---

we all are gymnasts
just by being here,
just walking around.

And that we have to kill to eat
is the hardest of all,
it bruises the soul

or whatever that plasma really is
that thinks it's me
and thinks it's right now.

When will it know
who or what it really is,
when will it know what it knows?

Meantime these funeral games.
Getting out of bed is victory,
standing at the window idly looking out

is worth an Olympic laurel crown.

11 August 2010

LIGHTS

show us
where we will not go.
Be brief, Solomon,
your wives attend you.
Get back to them,
they are your wisest
responses, spare us
just a few less wise.
It is a comfort sometimes
just to recite their names.

11 August 2010

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Why are so many things
like reading the newspaper
at the breakfast table
and there is no news.
And no food.

11 August 2010

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Places to go to be sure of where you're coming from. That's a lot to ask of a bunch of trees or a sprawl of beach. Still, by the time you get there you're a little older, naturally you'll feel a little different. In this world, different is mostly better. And good or bad, every day is different, right? So this new place, the view of the neighbor's barbecue pit, the golf course down the hill, Mount Scaggs in the distance, it was worth it. Everything is new, at least to you. Now you can sit down and answer a few simple questions about your life. Life. I know it sounds like wife. Are you married?

11 August 2010

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Boats. Oil boiling.

Lay the railroad tracks

right on the sea—

by alchemy

the salt will bear the steel.

My mother

taught me this trick.

She was a seal.

11 August 2010

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To be sure of the sea
sprinkle one teaspoon of rock salt
freshly ground on your lawn or in some park,
speak a few lines of a White Language
(Hebrew, Greek, Latin) to a bird,
preferably black (crow, starling,
grackle). Then hold without chewing
a leaf in your mouth from a big tree,
take it out all wet and stick it
to the door of your house.
When it dries out and blows away
you'll know the ocean is safe.

12 August 2010

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Writing down your dreams
is paying alimony to the night.
All the money won in that dark place
invest some of it in silence.
Ecology—stop interfering,
let the dream take care of the dream.

12 August 2010