

1-2009

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## NEW YEARS LETTER

At this even moment  
a slight perturbation of  
all I know  
turns white.

It begins me.

Your pair of gloves  
the dual number in Old Greek  
mittens of meaning  
in which the secret fingers move  
invisibly and safe  
crossing and making  
spells

as if to ask  
what lurks inside the sense  
we have of 'inside'—  
inside what,  
and who goes there?  
Is the heart just the weary sentry  
patrolling the precincts of  
a walled-off garden  
fountain of blood?



But who can say? It is too early  
for the words to mean  
what we usually do,  
someone is making sounds in the arroyo  
this me needs to investigate,  
the burrow through the world that goes through us  
too, the sounds inside us  
constantly rising to confuse us with glory,  
we *heard* our way here and now what,  
suddenly I touch no one's hand  
and it feels warm.

### Identity

is born just from sensation  
repeated,  
the long goodbye inside hello.  
Now watch your mother being born.  
Now ride this rock ridge—  
shale your house and shabby weather,  
  
what is she babbling now, priests,  
in the thick fume of burning laurel.  
write down every syllable  
using what in these mechanic days  
sounds something like a rhythm  
flesh might move to,  
every syllable

a person in this play,

as many words as people in the world,  
will last till all are spoken,

the Bible begins with a girl alone on a rock.

How she grows,

divides her attention till he answers.

Then hand in hand with what she's made

they traipse inside out to find

a set of probabilities—

sand, hill, gorse

of Donegal—

where we can be.

Wherever there is river.

You don't realize—

that is, make real to yourself—

how mysterious a river is,

a vein, a going

right through us and with lives in it

and the shadow of the mountain

falls on the flowing water and the shadow stays.

Hunger is our difference.

Spill fire from the shell you stole,

heaps of them by Staatsburg shore,

*Venus mercenaria*, my life for yours

soft valvey interlude, soft door.

Come fasten the driver to the car.

This New Years letter

with no apostrophe

yet says its piece

to all, the sundry

emporium a language is—

listen to the fo'c'sle of your heart

to what the men are saying in you

the ones who signed on for the duration

of your blue voyage,

human,

the grizzled mermen, effete midshipmen,

angeloi.

Listen to the light.

It flashes on the golden background

in Sieneese painting,

it is a thing



## 2.

Then someone waited.

*Hydrangea*

*artificialis*, sky-blue, posing  
in the window – a Dutch thing, really,  
to cheer the house inhabitants  
and the stranger too who passes  
along such narrow streets,

Omnibus, someone for everyone.

Sky is the second house

and earth the first—

say one set of priests

while others argue

sky came first and from it we sailed down

insouciant,

gull-like, bringing only appetite.

Sumus. And here we are,

a million years later and with Latin names.



But who was waiting?

Whoever he was, he was your mother  
and the orchestra was loud, the pretty  
violinist from Lapland had a hidden  
fifth string on her instrument,

*anima*

*terrestris*, that weird flower,  
soul of us on earth,

you hear it

shimmering just past the ears, inside?

A middle-ear issue, outside, the jungle  
noises waiting for you,

Assam on morning,

those humdrum insects

you hear all day long and never see, see?

Was it the music waiting, a nutty elegy,

I am the opposite of nationality, she said,  
cashews are poisonous between nut and husk,  
did you know that,

I did, am I a politician

to guess the mood of random vegetables,

leave me alone with your facts,  
this is snow, snow,  
fallen yesterday and more to come,  
Sibelius, *tu sais?*

Before a fireplace a family  
gathered in the shrill of silver flutes  
to adore the new-born,  
what is the price  
of peace, who brings it to the door?  
And who pays *that* child when at last he comes,  
and the doorbell rings the end of the world?

Someone cut paper flames  
from orange crepe paper  
and set them to blow  
merrily this way and that  
from a little table fan,  
little black paper curls to look like smoke  
moved in the same speed  
same wind that moved the fire.  
They were saying their prayers

hoping that everyone would get born,  
right there in the middle movement  
adagio, from the life I'm coming from,  
for once among mortality,

at ease, men,

the battle will never begin.

We don't besiege cities anymore—  
lead your long-horned cattle home  
deep into the borrowed book.

Only the reading belongs to you,  
the words, the words are waiting.

But could it be snow, though,  
soft on the back of my wrist,  
the flex of weather, remember  
when everything was a kiss,  
a book by Proust, a Long Beach  
afternoon?

That was a piece of paper,  
fold it up and put it in your pocket,



you are someone climbing up the stairs,  
like everybody else.

Here, I have a coat  
for you, just to keep you warm.  
It's taken me my whole life to understand  
summer is better than winter  
and what shall I do now with what I know?

2 January 2009

## **A reasonable reaction**

is a kind of fireworks  
after all – blue spangles  
up there where the aurora  
was guaranteed  
to anxious travelers  
once in their lifetimes  
to see the actual  
animal of earth—  
but one night instead  
over Albany just one  
of many, many lights,  
the spirit of keyboard  
hovers over sky – drunk  
in the aisles on alphabets,  
organ tones, then  
safe landing, the last  
miracle. Then ordinary  
religion begins. Take  
this cup and write me down.

2 January 2009

= = = = =

Tell me what you see  
from up there where your body is,  
old rock, castle underneath your thigh,  
the valley stretching out towards Italy—  
the ice we see down there.

So high we come and yet the car  
brought us most of the way, a little  
scramble up the hillside through the  
what's the California word for it,  
chapparal, past blue gentian,  
watch out for the lizards, and  
can't you see us too with all that  
seeing? I can only see  
through your body's sense of place,  
that's what 'here' means in my language,  
where you are, awake and feeling.

3 January 2009

= = = = =

Tell me more = Adore  
the things around you that you see,  
the rock beneath your seat,  
the cliff from which falcons fall  
into their wind-scything  
swoop of kill. Love what you see  
and make them all part of me.  
By mouth and skin  
resurrect the world. Be green  
that way, where every 'this'  
already has your hand on it,  
giving it to me, your infant  
alchemist you must feed  
me all my summers in one cup  
could be bitter could be sweet  
and the animals too are waiting  
for you to make them breathe.

3 January 2009



= = = = =

Something silver  
went through the air

it was a prayer  
no one let loose  
out from the trees

a life escaping life  
into the actual  
fixed blue,

a trace left in the mind,  
spoken.

3 January 2009

## LAMENTATIONS

When you sit on a stone  
you make it speak.

But are you listening?

The words ascend through skin  
to find you, you wait  
somewhere vague up there

until you taste them  
at the back of your throat  
then you must speak.

Then they do. You know  
only what the stone  
allows itself to tell you

you are a slave  
of this learning  
a disciple of the rock.

2.

Things need us

and you think about that.

How many mouths

have I coaxed to speak?

How many soft voices

endured my discipline?

You are a hundred of me

and none of you is mine

except the skin the stone shares

3.

The Roman bath house

had one room hot and one room cold

and one room in between

we ogled one another

the sizes of us, spring

and autumn, the godly water

leaves no skin untouched.

As if an elegy maybe

or something broken

drop of fresh blood on marble

love song of the littlest wound

are you still listening?

4.

Rough granite smooth shale

even tempered sandstone

tepidarium in between—

tell me what you hear

your whole life I've been

preparing you to listen

you need to be beaten

you need to be no one

for a little while

and then some other one

and then again until

you are nothing but hearing.

5.

I have tried to be your stone.

We do not stay in the same

rooms to each other

the stone you sit on

must always be the farthest place

like a rabbi crossing the street

or a lion leaving,

Where were we when we prayed?

Can you reckon where prayer goes?

6.

A rubber mask, a dental dam  
the doctor works into your mouth  
while the pretty assistant stands

here is your smile

here is your paper cup

here is your water

later, when the opera's over  
and you are back in Roman times  
alone with your skin.

7.

We know there is nothing  
inside the body  
we know the space inside

and space outside is  
one same universe  
the parts of it we touch

are fantasies and children's toys  
it dreams up skin  
to feel the dreamt-up stone.



8.

Can you trust me to play doctor  
to open cavities you never had  
and claim that they're yours?

To make you feel  
what I invented your body for?

Do you dare to feel

feel what I feel?

Frightened as you are I think  
you're the only one who knows my name.

3 January 2009