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WHEN THE FACE

is tired of being seen.

Salt also is weary
and fire that works so hard
and is always young.

But tired. The way
the face tries to remember
everyone it ever lay
itself naked to.

We do not see each other
we are witnesses only,
silent accomplices
to an act of seeing.

The face is tired
of such thinking, sleeps.

2.

Where I slept
last night defines
When an older woman
has a child's skin
it scares me. Un-
blemished by experience

3.

Even the shape of a thigh
or a tree stump counts.

It is a day outside the city,
everybody tired, walking
everywhere, miles, in heels.

4.

But they talk
mostly names
and predicates
and things possess *a*
where *a* is a quality
sometimes of the soul.

As so often we
(tired though we be)
contrive to imply
one another.

5.

Tracks imply trains,
don't look at the clock.
Not even the calendar
helps. Nothing runs on
time. Implication stinks.

6.

Among old names for trees
aspen stands firm
strange how its leaves tremble
in the wind not in word
not in time. *Aspe* or *opse*
the earliest name for poplars
— but how can you trust a name?
How can you trust a tree?

7.

The faces I don't recognize
but the bodies I do.
That's what a city means,
Cratylus, a body is a name
spoken by the invisible. Soul.

8 January 2009

Rhinebeck

= = = = =

I do not know you,
I barely know what I know
when I look at you.

Up close you look far away
and I can go with that,
over some sea, not ocean

so wide maybe but a way,
aways. And long ago,
that's what I know,

you are long ago, the way
so vivid in you now
gleams out of cave walls

wax paintings from the Fayoum
when you were little boys
who went to sleep

beneath the sand.

Your eyes are dark wounds
on the wall where fire was,

or blood. Now whatever
there is is far—
the furthest place always

is your hand,
what it does, it does
what the distances

make you speak.
Everything is far
to be you here.

8 January 2009

LAST LETTER TO THE TRUTH

for Susan

Never stop playing with the truth
the answer *must* be in between
the best approximation and

I sound so sad because I can't have everything
this child is me
an elegy

an infancy

doesn't owe
anyone anything

thinks a hand
to reach out
to touch what it thinks is there

marriage in a dream
a whole life in a minute

one pressure on the skin
the coffee didn't even cool

it is enough to drink
when you analyze it
it is the ground
or your analysis is
or is the infant up yet
one blue eye one brown eye
bodies of hunger roaming the sky

Religion is one of the terrible
names of growing up

let us have no more religion
than a child had then
no more nationality

a child is alone
with its mouth

with what it says with what it eats
every infant Hercules

So we had no children
this leaves us free to remember

all day what we always knew,
people have children to stop being them.

Sein meant

someone else's sin

became you

or begat,

sein mean to accept

your own hunger as the truth

and never doubt your appetite

is that what we never forgot?

What was it that we never doubted

but always forgot?

that runs us

fuel of our flight, far

into the regions in between

where everyone goes

to live

jungle

living or being, which is *sein*

one has a body

and one has a scream

a scream that turns into food
or into you

everything I do is just for this
to shine a quick light
on someone just disappearing

how can the shadow last
when the body's gone?

yet it does and is an always
it hungers for its lost original
yes *sein* is shadow,

being is shadow of some other
or yet again, close,
as close as no is to yes,
your heart on my sleeve,

a line from a play
we practice till it speaks
trying to get it right

trying to get it to fit into the action
of what all those people seem to be doing
rushing this way and that way and saying things

I want to say things too

the best approximation
midway between a child and an idea
the image forms

or the word speaks.
Nothing ever woke me but this thing to say.

Only later it was hearing—
I heard with my mouth

came to the point can hardly
believe you let alone myself,
that self would be the most distant faith
soi \leftrightarrow *foi*
fate trembles out of the sound of words:
bless me mother for I have *sein*.

No it's not enough to guess at these answers
hoping someday the question itself
comes over the horizon
and looks at us with the same soft infant eyes
we use to look at anything

Any I always would love to be you
what would any you always love to be

the answer is strictly between
the best approximation and a day next week
when for example two people could
sit at a table in a café
and be content to be there and so disposed
—coffee cooling, pastry still half eaten,
pleasant human creatures moving in the warm room
some snow outside, steam on the window, steeple
half a block away, unknown church
smell of cinnamon—

and think all these things were talking to them
and they were able and content to hear them
and from such hearing construe a ready destiny,
fatum, ‘what has been spoken,’

the secret word whispered into ‘the lap of the gods’
our whole life hears or
only with one whole life are such words heard

we can make sure at least
the pauses are in the right place

hardly ever enough silence
to make a poem from
hardly ever enough blank space
to write it down

and now when you're listening
will he say "Listen!"

now when you're holding him
will he say "Take
this body"

what is this 'this'

we were bidden
so long ago to take
take and remember

so stubbornly we failed

and this particular failure
is enshrined in our history
under the general name 'music'
or what we use to keep from hearing.

Because hearing alas is here-ing.
Is remembering
to be a member
of all this agitation in the unreasonable café
the cage with no bars
the plain with no horizon

how long does this adolescence last
not a single image left to be

the scoundrelly pleasures of being right
have too long detained me
from the naked wrong

I can't see further than that
ars nesciendi
the art of air of not-knowing
breathe deep and go on
through the inexhaustible museum
this granary thy father heaped up for thee
and we forgot him too
in time

 or what else is time for
but forgetting?

An elegy new meant to heal.
As a stone was meant to fall from heaven
and remind us when we stumble on it
remind us of what it too forgot

don't look too closely at the stone,
it has a face you already know.

9 January 2009

THE ARK

Let some
word we
didn't know
begin.

The ark opens
and they come out
the scrolls
who speak themselves
into our anger
our desire

the words who are bodies
of their own

and I would be crow
to call them,
first of birds,
tell them
every word must do the work of another

every animal must carry another's name.
Unless I am willing to be the other
the ark will never open

the ark is the divine presence
where the one waits to become many

I tell you
wrap the prayer shawl snug around your hands
till you can read every word in the weaving

then open the doors of the ark
and become everyone you see
as I did once
and now am every morning,

this jabber all that's left of me.

9 January 2009

RENEWAL, OR MEANING

To renew
is to have something in mind.
Something in mind
is the meaning of what is seen.

What the seeing does—
a paper-cut on the surface of the mind
the bravery of anything
is just trying to do.

Forty years ago Michael True
asked me to translate the Mass
into decent English.
But the gleam is *in* the diamond

not on it. A photo of the jewel
can't see the gleam – sees it
if at all as a blank bright spot.
Leave the Latin alone.

It has to be old to work.
What the gleam is is time
an uninterrupted lineage
of priests and faithful

saying these words
with their hearts on fire
on grey ordinary mornings
minds finally aware.

9 January 2009

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Old movies took
time to ripen.
85 minutes of black
gunshot black blood
white faces and I'm
out in the alley again
in terrible sunlight
train going over us.
Any image see
and never the same be.
Ever again. Taste
in my mouth, sweat
coming back.
Alone with what I've seen.

10 January 2009
(15 January 2009)

THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

A. My typical typo is a kind of proleptic foreshortening – when trying to write ‘time to ripen’ I wrote ‘tipen.’

B, Who cares about you and your trivial mistakes?

A. I do, because they’re mine. And I have to figure me out before I get out of this sentence. And also because from trivial mistakes the world is made.

B. Are you saying the physical world we know is just a typo from God’s hand when He intended saying something altogether different?

A. Not exactly. I mean that our mistakes are canonized into judgments, critiques, laws, vows, the commandments of which religions are made or at least they propagate themselves. Each religion offered a bizarre new set of sins – mistakes to replace and at the same time symbolize our own old blunders.

B. Where is God in all this?

A. I don’t know. In all religions? Only some? In none? I hope he’s not the figure so popular with late 20th Century theologians: an inchoate energy desperate for a definition of Itself that only humans can intuit, perceive, invent, articulate.

10 January 2009