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On Pitkin Avenue
waiting for a bus
that never comes

but a boy in a passing
Pontiac is playing
a battered tuba

loud out the window
a sound like a potato
and why not,

everything makes you cry.

9 March 2009

SPRINGBOARD INCIDENT

A gull perched there
the frightened novice diver
let fear of the big bird
hide the fear of falling
and waited on the tower
while down below some
fresh boys tossed one
squealing girl into the pool
the way they do.

A gull can only rule the sky.
And there it stood,
its slightly downcurved beak
motionless dangerous.
Not even hungry. Between
earth and heaven there is
no true commerce.
Wet girl. Loud boys.
The gull's calm severity.

9 March 2009

DENSITIES

for Nathan, for Amy

In quest of greater densities, desire.
Choral litany of me me me—
the soul needs something silent here—
take a vow.

Keep silent all through Lent
or walk from here to Ohio
where the serpent mound so-called
remembers people on the earth

before meager redskins palefaces
and us, people who were scrawny
pilgrims from a nearby star
Africa or Raratonga, had an idea

and left the earth in search of it
leaving a coil of dirt behind
that if we learn to whisper well
will come alive and tempt

new Eves to holier comedies
and He will come up again
out of the tomb and shove the rock
aside and you will speak again.

9 March 2009

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As if it were really here
a heron in the shallows
where the Sawkill bends—
a quiet place, eddy meek,
water brown, a little rain
and almost spring. A bird.
Bends to seek. Some
life beneath our notice.
Like us below the clouds.

9 March 2009

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I tried to be on care of these
but they were dead outside my hands
who knows who killed them
I read the papers and they were dead

I told my beads wrote editorials
and they were dead despite what said
I get sad ashamed of what I did
get words and ears upset about

crimes far away from here and here
I go to bank and smile at my clean cash
drive my nice car and eat tomatoes
that fly all by themselves on crisp green leaves

straight from the vine untouched in Yucatan.

10 March 2009

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Should poets in an ill time
write defective sonnets?
Or seek instead by perfect closure
to heal the distant government?

Or squat all night
in their natural cellars
silent making bombs?

When the king is sick
the fields don't grow.
And I don't know.

10 March 2009

ETRE POETE

Nothing clear.

Be a cow if you can,

be all the cow you can,

wash your hands before you touch the pen,

wash them with your spit.

10 March 2009

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Brittle life.

Less commentary—

only images

succeed.

The rest is politics.

10.III.09

CAMPHOR

we called them
back then, little balls of naphtha
that did to moths what camphor used to do.
Mothballs. What a strange word.
Call bullets folkballs
because it's us they kill?

10.III.09

WORK IT OUT BUT MAKE IT SMALL

1.

Lovers all over the place
pretending to be sciences.
Beech tree by my office window
smooth as an elephant
in plain sight. Men at work
seem indifferent to botany—
this is the sorrow of America,
the country that used to live here.

2.

My sorrow. Be small
beside the big tree. Be
an excited immigrant
again. Regard the broad
river with less composure.

3.

The trees are full of animals who don't
care a lick of salt about you and your problems.
By every pond sly mosquitoes sting
everyone promiscuously – and this
is somehow our liberty. Or freedom
is a phase of our disease.

4.

I want to cry for all the mornings
I didn't notice the beech tree
year after year. Which makes me
one more divided human, and it a tree.
Maybe such things are safer thanks
to the ignorance of people like me.

10 March 2009

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When the world had a place to go
the birds went first.

And we came last,
people are the slowest pioneers.
scared of our own shadows.

And why not. They
are the ones who come behind us,
last of the last.

The frightful fiend my own identity.

Look over my shoulder and see the ones I've hurt.

10 March 2009

ODE TO RUSKIN

Every corner is necessary.
Hegel is no island.
And the river's mission
is to make bridges necessary too.
Ovens and wooden peels
to slide bread in and out. Pylons
of high-tension lines, looped,
catenaries with birds to perch on them,
garbage trucks, the whisper
of a little girl to her big doll.
The dog. The endless mistakes.
Hospital, morgue, cathedral.
Waxy faces listen to the law.
Every chain is necessary. Why.
Who made the windmill work the wind,
who made us have to eat
things that grow and things that move
by themselves and claim to be alive.
Wilful neglect may be the answer.
Whatever is unnecessary
is our hope. Whatever we don't need
may heal us. Heal death itself,
the prime necessity. Now find
what we don't need and make it sing.

10 March 2009

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they live in a city of ancient signs
— Ann Lauterbach

If you dream of an old man

grilling sausages by the side of the road
the links still coiled, fat hissing, the meat
shriveling down inside its casings, fat spitting out,
it means that the weather will change but only for you

if you dream of an artichoke peeling its own pointy uncomfortable leaves

one by one till the soft chew of the choke spills out
it means that the languages you learned in school will be forgotten

if you dream of a woman walking on the beach at low tide

it means that someone is doing your horoscope and getting to know you
far better than you want to be known

if you dream of a carrot being sliced and the orange rounds rolling off the
counter and bouncing onto the tile floor

it means that unborn children are looking for rich parents to conceive them
and you should wonder if you are one

. . . . 10 March 2009

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Asbestos meaning
inextinguishable
Homer uses it for laughter
the endless laughter of the gods
who look upon us
their children their baby brothers
fumbling in the mud below

drone of imprecision
we live in, like an always airplane
overhead, conventional,
propeller driven cargo plane
wings shaking a little
over us, the smirk
of politicians sounds like that

imprisoned on the earth.

10 March 2009

HABITAT DISORDE R

Uranus in which of your lovely
travels, house? I'm talk to me
again, the only immaturity I know
this side of politics. Ransom,
Our Lady of Ransom, I was born
on her feast. Patroness
of those who liberated slaves
and captives. Our Lady of Random
who frees my mind from big ideas,
the slave mind I also am
vowed to set free. Not by silence
as you have local chosen
brickwise to inscribe
your regnal names and titles
on time's frail wall but
touching the furthest cloud with yawp
as befits my sacred calling.
Which is to call.

2.

But when I say listen, listen
I am not meaning listen to me.
There is a different rave
all night goes round us

and it's those danced we mind
and I commend you, attend, attend
the grope of body through the fang of noise
to know another, as if (and is)
the body is the deepest thing we are
and hear's a clue to it, a thread
you follow to the touch itself, dark
groundwork of our business, language
is just a way to touch.

11 March 2009

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The olives tasted weird.
The sun still thought
it was the eighteenth century
shone on human hope,
bright steel answered
gleam by gleam. Grammar
counted. Love still remembered.
The highway still went there.
But the birds, something
was wrong with the birds.
The swans, their curiously heavy
heads to be so small
hung low, searched their reflections
or peered right through them
down, down to where the action is,
What can a bird see? It's too
early to ask questions, I was born
long enough ago to be you
if you want to get technical.
The Radetzky March is playing,
the emperor is dozing, the phone
is ringing. Some things never change.

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all we need is to be wonderful
again the carousel is broken but
the horses still go round

. . . 11 March 2009

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How to show the other side
of what has no face.
How to hear when no one speaks.

But I read faces all too well,
I want what they say
most when they're looking away

into that unholy privacy
where their own game goes on
all the time but sometimes

rapt they let me witness them
then I know who they are
and an intolerable longing

comes over me.
Night in Alexandria
and no morning ever.

12 March 2009