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Being in one city or the other
as long as the time vista doesn't change
the almost gold of new red brick
in sunset sun, the enamel of the sky
just then, and all the citizens at home
in their purple shadows, the streets
are just for me and my anxieties
running from one side of the island
to the other because a great ravine
opened in the middle of the station.
We are isolated now. She in her
stillness, I in my hurriedness.
But above all this busy taking
is the immense gift of the sky,
the permanent, the consolation.
Never will it leave us to face
our destiny alone—look up
and understand. Look down and do.

20 August 2009

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Doesn't have to be moral,
peach. You can reach

deep into the cloth
and find the smooth vacancy

which means history:
time's laundry, hint

of lavender, odor
is a cage for thoughts,

sometimes I can't get out,
you tangerine.

2.

Everything has been taken
out and put away.

We have to change
our mirrors. Honey.

Then they'll change us,
stop us making sense.

3.

I was never more moral
than want would let—

do what you want
until it stops.

4.

It was hardly fair
to a little girl,

her rabbit nipped her
then chewed some pages

in her favorite book.

It was almost as bad as poetry.

20 August 2009

WILD TURKEYS

They tolerate human presence in the spaces they invade, are not too worried by our movements, pass close. This earns them the reputation of being dumb, as if intelligence is the quotient of fear. And as if we are much to be feared. But I wonder about these birds. They breed, they succeed. Twenty years ago none was ever seen round here, then one especially snowy winter they blew in from the mountains and stayed. There are lots of them in the woods now, bless them.

I was sitting at the table writing about them, I said “the wild turkeys chirp.” Then I opened a book Elizabeth Robinson had sent and read: “to chirp or disappear.” I thought: maybe she is my mother. Then I turned to another page and read: “we / say / mother.” It seems eerie, the way natural things always do. Wild turkeys are weird.

There is nothing more uncanny than nature. I suppose that’s why we’re so eager to go out into it and sweat and get stung and break our skin and think that such strenuous discomfort is somehow like saying our prayers. Tell me the truth, mother, are we?

20 August 2009

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Turkeys on the shady side lawn
well-upholstered birds—
food for them not far.

So much loud discussion
and then the crows begin.

Later, silence makes me
look up:
the birds are gone.

20 August 2009

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It is not just getting through the rye grass
as soon as spring turns into summer
but now at the bad end, the swelter on it,
the Sumatra of the soul, say, butter
quivering in the dish—I hate it—sweat
is a colonnade infested with thieves.
No thought secure against such weather.
The gloomidity. Rain that stands up there
like a reluctant suicide and does not fall.
But a few leaves do. Sun brief in trees.
Breeze answers. Think something else,
this weather is too theological,
reeks of mildew (a word cognate with
it turns out the Latin word for honey).
Make the best of it. Roots and brances
and sometimes flowers. And sometimes bees.
But sometimes hornets. And sometimes fragile
paper nests my father would take down—
look, a book with no words in it at all.

21 August 2009

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Morgen wird's besser—
yet a little sun saturates the red seat cushion
on the maple chair
and a quiet floor fans almost brings
the air to life.

21.VIII.09

= = = = =

When you read with your mind on something else
when you keep reading, how many books are going on at once?
The rule of the reader: this book thinks me
so I think back. The backdrop
of all the book's thousands of words is my own things.
The move each other, sometimes brutally,
in me. Who wins? The things are landscape,
the words are the weather that goes by—
though it can burn or frostbite or drown.
And sometimes an army also trundles by
full of deaths but no one in me dies.
Dead men read no tales—and books know that,
there has to be someone left
when all the words are done. Someone
to turn the last page. How merciful
a book is compared with a scroll
which could fall from a dying hand
and go on reading itself unwinding
long after the blind eyes of gravity close.

21 August 2009

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The power of something not known
to be said
so then the farmers rake it from the sky
store winters in their barns
the wise times keep
onions in sandy soil
a tall leek purple floreted aloft
then it turns out to be a book.

I mean a woman reading a man like a book,
a woman all by herself doing what she does
and I know nothing of her except that she is
that is how it should be, how everything is.
Words were always enough but they fall asleep.

Wakeless walk in wordless morning—
just like an old Saxon with no sword—
march over fields no matter, brave
as silent winter in the woods, keep
it to yourself, this bare evangel
of your quiet bones—become the very
skeleton inside yourself, that mind
in there is waiting for you to start,
green light before rain. The strange
aftertaste of having spoken.

22 August 2009

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Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele

Adorn yourself, dearest soul,
with branches of yew tree
branches of spruce—green
becomes you, and the red
berries of the former yield
juice that lights one way to God
whose secret name is not
so different from your own.

22 August 2009

listening to the Brahms chorale at Olin

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Nature's peaceful lies
persuade us to touch
each other and to linger

things rhyme with one another
bees drift over black-eyed susans
soft winds realign

nothing really here for us
but how it glistens.

22 August 2009

listening to Dvorak in Olin

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Four-sevenths of a sonnet
waiting for its explanation—
it has to be a song
some Chinese characters
cut into a limestone stele
in a lost desert outpost.
Here is the edge of what matters.
Here is the boundary of the real.
Raiding Mongols understand this sign:
explanation by its nature
is three parts kiss and one part death.

22 August 2009

listening to Dvorak in Olin

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You can read my gospel

anywhere you look

and I thought it was me talking

gesturing widely like Whitman with a cigar

saying This is what I mean, pointing

at oak trees and a red clay road

half washed out in the rain that isn't letting up

and a house with lights on and people

doing the slow sarabande of ordinary life

but it was a dream talking, and I understood

it all means for itself, means more than I mean,

mushrooms threading under earth the paths of stars.

23 August 2009

[ARS POETICA]

Getting something down

and hoping it's enough.

Then finding too much

and cutting even more away.

Sometimes you have to look close

to see the facets of a ruby,

or the face carved in sardonyx,

postmark on a letter from a dead friend.

23 August 2009

[ARS POETICA]

The import of being
is saying so I say
again *against Babel*
lucid silences

would be the word on it
not till an artifex
wrecks our speech
can we speak true.

24 August 2009

= = = = =

Small, small, my brothers
a few words will sister us.
Your muttered noises
are figments of a word
a single (simple) word that says us—
as if a family were the heart of something else.

24 August 2009

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Regimen. And outfall of it:
be ruled by hand
and have a house. Be ruled
by heart and have a window in 't.

24.VIII.09

= = = = =

The cost of things going away
is going away with them.
Everything we ever touched
carries some of us with it
wherever it goes. They say
leave a used coat out in starlight
to wash the previous wearer's
soul threads out of it.
We can't help it. We touch
each other. The stars
love us and take as much
as they can of us away.

24 August 2009

= = = = =

Consider the elephant—
it didn't want you to do it
but you did it. Things
come from that. Sorry

to be so vague but things
keep coming from other things
and there you are. Elephant
looks at you. What mood

does his small eye
instill in you? Remorse?
Then for what sin?
Or just embarrassment

as if you had each seen
the other naked and
how could that not be,
being how you both are?

The arrival of an elephant
brings a horde of questions.
Appearances are meant
to deceive, you begin to think,

look with your eyes closed,
you think. And don't do
what the elephant wants you
not to. Think about it.

24 August 2009