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LUST

itself a wander
a kind of Sinai
across burning brass
the fang of history—belle histoire—
at your heels.

High barren rock
a convent for the unperplexed
under the endless blue Talmud of the sky
resolving everything

into ever smaller
particulars.
the hair curled on your cheek.

Desirer. Desired. Weft
on some preposterous loom
the seraphim do
the shuttle shunt from wing to wing
texting us into the pattern of our appetites—

escape me, Robert,

I am your self
I have pushed you all the days of your life
from bowl of porridge to the laps of goddesses,

one mere you.

Yetzer,

the Impulse, Queen

Bee of the baddest

hive

who let her in,

it is almost time

I mean almost true

but *Zeit* and *Wahrheit*

have nothing to do with each other

Time and Truth

like any other man and wife—

the self was silent then

brooding on the soft catastrophes

by which and in which it knew itself best

I would not mind (I thought) if my self

spoke less to me (and then I thought

this might be blasphemy—if my self

were silent

who would the music be?)

7 October 2009

THE WIND

says it all
look for
the iron
you called
the book
flopped open and I read
no more that day
when once I saw
what was written there
a glass
with my face trapped in it
glass made from paper eyes made from words

ran into the sea to be
away from her, just be

the object of your desire
reveals the true
lineaments of your punishment

embrace this well
beloved one and flee ever after

a break of birds
blacks the lower sky

ta metarsia

your wedding cake of cloud

if you get the one you

love you'll grieve

if you don't you'll grieve

a different melody

maybe purer

the one with no lawyers and police

the one where you don't have to flee

to Spain and try to drown off Ibiza

or drink yourself to sanctity in Compostela,

just sit in the garden of your little house

and watch the birds slice up the sky—

each line they sketch

is meant for you

to distract you from your grief—

that's all that *meaning* ever is,

the tender hand of the world on the small of your back.

8 October 2009

SOFT ANSWERS BACK

Keep trying to make it close.

Soft ess. Ess as in bird

or the highlands,

frogs and such

in fens.

Call it the fens.

The way they seem to call

in spring twilights

as if you had come close

to time's message center and

all the chattering secretaries

called out to you at once

each with a different text

as from the slave windows

of the Women's Prison by Jefferson Market

their voices cried out to you

and you were all of their husband.

Years ago.

Keep it close

as in a particle

funny old name for what has no parts

and famously exists only when you look for it,

like beauty,

compliant phantom of the laboratory,
its heart on my sleeve.

Close

the way a door is to a house
or a house to the center of the earth
the weary earth
all the way down.

Pilgrims and centaurs
pass there too, and there
the evil woman will lie down
with the good man and both will rise up pure
and the evil man will lie down
with an evil man and a child be born
and they will call his name Good Serpent
and he will crouch on the roof for a thousand years
keeping off the lightning
and making love
with all the other weather.

I woke up thinking we were all centaurs
and everyone I ever really see
enters into me
and spoils the yankee trimness of my soul
so I splay out into the glad
multiples of form.

He said it

but I was listening.

I wrote it down

in candlewax

in the smelly grease

of wool still on Lord Ram,

he thought it was a cow

lowing that woke him

but it was a cloud,

a loud cloud over Dunsinane

where we wake every dawn and kill our master

just to get on with the business of the day

he said,

and the lilac bush I use for a heart

burst into flower some blue some white

sirens went off,

no violation

of autumn will go unpunished

she will be beaten her own guitar,

the noisy humiliation of feeling *anything*.

But I had forgotten the stone

I went back and put it down

he said, are you an animal

to distrust me so,

you think I kill, your tongue

so tentative on my behalf?

Here, this stone is the one you meant,

the soft one,

soft one,

it sits in your clothing like an otter

eating a fish

half in half out of the stream,

or rests calmly in your lap

like something you saw in the theater

when the glare-light off the stage

swept over the audience and you saw

what was going on in all the rapt faces,

near you, near you they were and you saw,

o one who looks away from the play

can never look back,

he said,

and there was a sound in heaven

like empty barrels rolling

in Trommer's brewery up by Hylan Park

in the old days, Americans,

when we drum-beat on our innocence

to keep the war away.

All, all

is about softness,

and how to be,

and how to be to one another
as the air, mild amber air of autumn,
is to us all, even me, he said,
over whom so many blue skies have passed
without wearing much of me away
though there is less of me now
than when we both woke

an hour back

from the false security in which we feigned
to be sleeping

while certain women

took the world away

and hid it

so when we woke

there was nothing but conversation.

Is this Paradiso then, all talk

and no image?

Earth again, the mower thought,

how long before the snows come

relieve me of this fretful dream?

I too would be cut down

by the sky's softest shadow, is it?

O they will never own language

the ones who mow the lawn,

they are enemies of the obvious

of the spontaneous,

they are henchmen

of some occult design:

the world when I change it,

he said

and the centaurs nodded, shaggy.

mare-rumped,

full of quiet contradiction.

I must be a centaur too

if I'm so willing to listen,

and always put up with his tirades

like a camera enduring what it captured—

filmless lenses, he went on, rolling

through the world, seeing, no record

ever of their passionate persuasions—

why I tell you all the time

just write it down

and let the miracles come later,

red ocher palm print on the wall,

the Talmud fallen open on the desk

just to the right place

which is, I suppose

(he said), any place that has words on it—

words let the miracle wake up,

the orgasm you call 'meaning something'

as in I am the meaning of you.

But what if the end
came closer.

hurried towards me
out of its own volupté
to be embraced

and all my hurry
coaxes it towards me too,
soft destiny, telos,
the end of politics,
light dancing us—
and there sudden is an us
for light to touch,

flesh
and no phantom?

All flesh is phantasm

he said, that is why
morning follows night
to teach us to wake up,
and anywhere you think you are
wake up from that too,
reality is the torpid pillow on your bed,
wake to the actual,

be vague, my brother,
as all your sisters are.

9 October 2009

OCTOBER DAWN

at first light the hunters
could it be me
afraid the hammer politicians
driving stakes into holy earth
but it was guns
when people think it fun
to kill the quiet people
of air and forest, come
from the city to make this bleed.

2.

anger it said in me
to be angry
the way the roses of Sharon
are profuse this year
still mauve on dark green
in rain and gunshot
woke me, domestic
crime, isn't the deer
your wife isn't the
waterbird your mother?

3.

and anger just anger and never just
the anger I feel at the hunters my brothers
no different from the anger they
do at the ducks?

honest indignation

makes a shotgun sound
one barrel for the enemy one for the truth.

4.

anger dies us
in the world
stronger than language
spluttering sunrise now.
Every war is the same war.

10 October 2009

GIRL LOST

Lost compression is a knave calendar
it said and left me to wonder
half an hour

where the girl had gone.

So far away, our Julie,

a name

spoken out the window,

lost?

Is glass porous atmosphere?

Can a mirror sleep?

How far exactly

did you go into her

and why don't you call,

girls are men to one another,

strong,

young Caesar Augustus

in her clothes,

victress of the Middlest Sea.

Grape arbor by a college dorm

broken window in a downtown bank

and nobody there,

we don't want your money,

grape arbor by Hymettus

and the bees

sound like Germans sleeping after lunch,

of course a girl is their sunshine

but like the sun itself

is far,

eight minutes to her skin,
sun, feminine in Old English,
goes to bed too soon and then—

was the sun *pregnant* with us,

is that what happened,

yes?

we are spun
from her whirling womb?

She looked down on the sea.

She grew the ground.

2.

Why don't you call her up

she needs to hear from you

she needs to wear

a snug white sailor suit

like a Russian ensign

or a seagull sleeping on a bollard,
why not telephone, that cold thing
or text her where she lives
always twisted in the word
from some dumb boy,

be the boy,

disguise yourself in gruff vapidty
like any lout

and she will love thee

baring her soft neck to your carious fang.

Like that.

She lost compression
with the square root of the distance

and we forgot.

Now she is California or worse
a shadow-memory we have to share.
You do it. I'm the wrong
species,

it comes down to you
to dare that priestess from that altar.
Rescue the sun from the greedy sky.

10 October 2009

= = = = =

We're flying to a new country
we're going to have fun
bossing around people who don't
understand much of what we say
but still bring us unfamiliar things to eat.
The unfamiliar tastes good.
We like them too but are glad
we can live over them not among—
mingling would be unfair to both parties
and what's unfair can't be much fun.
After a while we're comfortable enough
to write books in new languages,
new moralities like a clam shell
opening eat me eat me the waves the waves.

11 October 2009

= = = = =

It was the margin all
along I clung to

break down

firemen, there is no boundary now,
words in free fall
the liberty I used to roam
I claim anew

where the weight of what got said
spelled where you found it

the subaqueous ventricle of common speech
pumps pure space

a word

is a crow commanding the air
the page the sky all pale permission

things

into which the feel might fall

and you be night around me

so close you hold

that at last I am forced

to be exactly where I am.

Or: we'll never get there this way,
a lot of cold a little heat,
but *there* is not what we're after
a lot of cold a little heat
we're on the track of where we are
the one place we must speak

here: this is your real name.

But I don't know
if I was listening
when they spoke

so often

silence

is comfort and comes

from inside the ears

to answer

before any question,

no,

I do not know

or if I know

what I know is wrong

or if not wrong

then of no use,

the birds of Shekomeko

have flown into the trees already

where here and there you find

a vagrant arrow still embedded,
you hear the birds but see not one,
or see just one and he

(so bright
it must be, fancydan conspicuous
a shot of blue a shot of red)

says nothing too.

Apes stood up and tried to be trees.
Our mouths opened and tried to be birds.

11 October 2009

= = = = =

Everything is a permission
until it isn't.
And whose failure is it then,
the drink or the drinker?

11.X.09

APOLOGIA PRO VITA MEA

Always ready

to be myself tomorrow

renewing what I know

into urgent ignorance,

I just woke up

how vast the territory

before I sleep and wake again

if then,

giving the world a chance or

fato profugus I found this place

to sit down and write for fifty years

as some of these trees will testify

soon as I can wake them with my song.

11 October 2009