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All the ways to spell tomorrow
add up to this: my hand
around your wrist
holding your palm up close
to be read or to be kissed.

Commentary:

The love they feel for one another
is the most accuracy prophecy—

why don't people know that
(when even the Bible did)

loving is knowing
and the future is no different from your hand.

16 August 2008

THEOLOGICAL SONNET

The real problem is nobody listens to Jesus.
I agree. For instance Jesus said Forgive
not fight. I agree again, I try to do that.
And he said if God brought two people
together let them stick – but who said a justice
of the peace was God? Divorce is a sacrament!
I sort of agree again, but what's your point?
They say Jesus but they mean Jehovah
a mispronounced mean old god they made up
from savage tribal chronicles. Oh.
Jesus never smote anybody! I agree,
what can I say, you're right. But being
right is not enough, the world is full
of angry holy men. And what about me?

16 August 2008

ONTOLOGICAL SONNET

A plastic rose in plastic water
in a real glass. What is real
about glass? Syrian bluegreen
two thousand years go by
and the glass sits in the museum,
glass thicker at the bottom:
it flows. Slow. And the rose
you mention is the rose I smell.
The rose you give me is the rose
I marry every morning to my mind
and hope for children. They cry
in every word in every silence.
We are here. We comfort you
in a world where everything is real.

16 August 2008

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Unkill their kind—
that is must learn.

A cobbler of the soul
need we
to renew

*Sydney Smith: to walk on gouty toes was "like
walking on my eyeballs"*

How to feel again
without the pain
that made us doubt
feel in the first place?

2.
A race of two slow men
one of them will win.
Our triumphs mean nothing—

only our failures are free,
sustain us, define us.

3.
A boy can fly a kite all afternoon
and still the sun goes down.

Did you ever
with it
into the darkest?

Darkling they said in one old night,
words like cream to rub between your hands.
Thighs. I am running with you now
and all I can understand is the sky
already deep blue with autumnness.

16 August 2008

ITE, MISSA EST

1.

He likes the touch these days
the mess the need
the holy Mass remembered from afar
the coast of Africa once seen
for all your Nile a pond out back enough
beaver swim beneath a cantilevered cloud
be time and he be home
that preternatural place
signed 'different' from any else
that doors him in, windows him out
and a slippery roof for Helga
to play upon, god of hail.
Her fingertips, his sense of time, *musicam*
ferentes, but strident they have to call it
when skill gets in the way of the thing done
and all you see is the doing it.

2.

Stalin was a man of sentiment it seems,
whence cruelty. Feeling is their ruin,
Russians. One way or another
as they say pain hurts. And pleasure too,
the smiling gourmand and the slimy empty oyster shells.

3.

See why he has to be specific,
the this and the that, not any eel or elmtree, no.
It must be the speciated, Ruinmaster,
the named thing, the torpedo
of your vague canoe, the pleasant shade
along the pleasant stream but once within it
their arms fall nerveless and oars float away—
tu sais? The, the, the
is what he means, until a day comes
when all things are named
and introduced into his caravan
shambling towards the sacrament of night
when he can take them, every one, and let them fall.

4.

Heaps of shells along the Irish coast, the Hudson
Highlands and even way up here most tropic north
middens and renewals, yellow fever
hot over the lagoons – only time makes a difference,
brackish water, Ace of Fundaments
blackens the desire prong, smutty citizens
hiding in the hemlocks – a rave? No,
a whiggery of cunning fools talking real estate,
cars idling in their bank accounts, and now
he's angry at all this well-healed otherness
invades the woods he thought were his.

5.

Invades the words he knows them by.
Time makes the only difference
as no one said before he went away.

6.

We were at Mass I think, the rabbi
looked down from His cross and understood
we knew not what we did, but blessed us
from afar for doing it. This too is He,
he thought. The world can be sometimes
so accurate it makes you cry out loud.

7.

Woodlands and neglect, the Mass is gone,
sent bluish up to sky our kindly master
Ouranos, by whom hurricanes at times
are spent to chasten us or uncontrol
the hard-locked things we essay to own.
Control means thoughtfulness. Ruthless
sentimentalists take over government
their only smile the gleam of money.
Tiger yawn. What he already owns
always stands ready to destroy him.
Or the Mass is done, the words went nowhere,
stayed here this Sunday morning set to measure
the shifting mildness of late summer leaves

whose shadows scored a daffy music
on the cherished maybe of his notebook page—
blank for all good citizens to taste and marvel.

8.

For any human is a language lord
and what he's doing is what He did,
just say it and it rises from the dead
inside the stinking darkness of the unconfessed.

9.

Admit it then, these are the Coasts of Lazarus
to which the scraped bow, howled horn,
summoned us. We thought,
and what we thought was music.
Muddy ankles, messy flanks, hair
full of spiderwebs, eyes reluctant,
mind at peace: knowing not much of this is real.
Or nothing is, and why not this house
among so many he has habited,
why not this mouse gnawing this end of bread,
why not the burning bush grown not to be
a tree on fire and by its flicker through its smoke
he gets to read the sticks and stones
of human language fall all round him.
Only this or these can hurt me he cries,
only these things that come too quick to name.

17 August 2008

A drunken rose

what could it mean
that such things be
strewn petalwise
round the unfallen

and no one thirsts?
that everything is finished
like sunshine leather
and in the dawn dim
buy the opposite of peace

which is not strife but striving
a woman can all more
because to think it
is to want it and to want it
is the resolution to attain

hence red hence richly
odorous hence thorned hence
drunk hence in a lover's
always hand to cherish
cautious her eternities.

17 August 2008

CREDECENCES

The scattered people waited by their tree
some kind of evergreen, the name beats me.
Is there a thing called a yew? Bright red
berries in it that symbolize the dead
somehow. Why is one color special even now?

If they began to move again would they lead
me and others like me to a new theology
or just another place, another color. Wheat
or mango maybe, once fashionable now only
a name among names and a heart in flames

like Jesus in those pictures on her wall
a long time ago. Now we're into time and all
the horrors begin to curl off the page
we read together of devotion and despair
where nothing in the mind fits the day outside

and there is grieving, barbed wire, names
lost into number, numbers soak into skin
and the wounds are red as berries even now
because memory is mostly color isn't it
not even smell or touch, the color lingers

and brings us with it. Us! There is no such
beast. Just people scattered round one tree.
And the name doesn't really matter, does it
or if you think it does, say why, and tell me
what I am doing in this story, it belongs

to someone else, outside me, but won't stay.

18 August 2008

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A world so different has to be true.
No tightness in it, soft
as an afternoon in Mexico
maybe when you're in the shade
of the cathedral, alongside the peddlers
selling dried snakes and incense,
nothing to worry about but death and hunger,

the simple things we like to forget.
Hence true. As if mere remembering
were a kind of philosophy, a logic,
that proves something. You'd think that these days,
book after book.

But there is nothing to remember.
It all happens again anyway. Always.
Look around you, outside the shadow zone
where the tanks roll by and their flags are so pretty.
The flags know a thing or two about truth.

18 August 2008

OWL SONG

They call me wise
because they hear me

they call me wise
because what they hear

makes them think
I'm talking and to them

and out of all the night
only I seem to be

what they call
communicating

the lost word they lack
the mama's kiss

they think they hear
from my hard lips.

18 August 2008

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Leave the story alone
we know too much already.
A dragon's waiting
always in the every morning
and noon's a maiden
hard to rescue from her rock.

Some say the dragon is the family,
its coils of obligation and complacency.
Some say it is the angry chromosomes
of would-be conquistadors,
teenage Balboas with an eye for snatch

But I say it is this mind of mine
that drags the soul down from its
immortal business and makes it only mine.
I have swallowed the girl and
accidentally turned into me.

19 August 2008

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So it is nonsense that we teach,
a healing absence of utility—

the secret commonwealth in every school
for whom the broad lifeless curriculum
is a shield for secret acts of spirit fervor:

poems, theoria, images that 'comfort and help' us,
wet ideas that drench a school-parched mind.

19 August 2008

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Only in beauty
do facts make sense.
The picture can live
without its frame.
Which, empty,
can instruct us: form
is hollow, has
no heart without
the colors of sympathy
that flood even the most
abstract painting
back in the days of paint.
And now we have a wall
that silences with sameness
whatever hangs on it,
the image displayed
vanishes into the display
itself, installation art
now is open-heart surgery
where the surgeon has
died along the way
and the patient stirs
scarcely under anesthesia—
it wears off only after
outside the museum when
the last thing we hear
as we close the door
behind us is his scream.

19 August 2008

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Art history lesson.
Children on the beach.
It's raining and they're worried,
water not staying in its place.

Will ocean win?
Or will they grow up
and stop caring, declaring
Turner bogus, Rembrandt all cellulite and dirt,

Botticelli silly pretty, Poussin literary?
God keep their sweet skins wet
long enough to get over it,
let them understand the sea.

19 August 2008

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An axe embedded in a fallen trunk—
our instruments are so boastful
but rust will smite them,
even on the Moon a subtle water
nocticizes them, they wake
useless in our hands. But by then
how much damage has been done?

But not by me, I claim, and even as I do
the words spill out, and they're the worst
sometimes, and the best all the time

to 'comfort and help,' said the poet,
that self-taught artisan who babbles them
and they show us the way to go
but never quite make clear the goal
and even when we get there the woods
look like the woods back home, birds
sing operettas we have heard before,
the ruddy axe still snoozes in the pine.

20 August 2008

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So something there accounting for me
and I keep calling – it's three months later
there and it's hard to find the right
morning to call, it might not even be
morning there, why is it so dark,
it's worse than Amsterdam at Christmas
and it's only August. Who is there
I want so much to talk to that I call?
And what is calling but the animal
turning its silent desire into breath
and the silent breath into noise. Call.
Call me if you want. What time is it
where you are? Is it me yet
on your calendar? What do I really
want from you? And can anybody
who is actually there actually give it
to me or anybody else, now or ever,
I will never stop calling no matter
what the phone refuses to answer.

20 August 2008

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So it was the other animal
who burrowed under the garage—
no stripes, just persistence,
cunning. They can do it
almost in their sleep,
the way love works best
when we're looking the other way,
then suddenly the heart thing
happens and we go there,
only there in all this brittle earth.
The other animal, I wait
to see in daylight to be sure.
But that never comes, just
the eternal evidence of the hole.

20 August 2008