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THE OAKS OF ABSENCE

1.

Oak trees in series
be my alphabet
(but elm I have a little
while yet, maple many,

ash and linden, locust)
but oak come spell me too
(yew and hickory, spruce lofty
against the house wall)

I need a sturdy consonant
to finish the First Word—
this is the only word
I'll ever say but it takes forever.

2.

Of course a piece of me
can be a part of you
and the other way round,

the round way
that answered the angry angulars
of what *I* says
when *I*'s the only speaking,

the round way where you
come in too,
the round word
that holds us close,
the round road we burrow
into one another through

by vowels alone,
fourteen pure different sounds
one for each night of the waxing moon
sung, and after every vowel pours
a day of silence.
Nothing is so quiet as the sun.

3.

The storms come in.
Radical. Bat wings
on a deaf man's screen,
old Hammer film, lend me
your ears to hear such
skirling, haggard vowels
weary speaking,
bat streaks across the moon.

Deer browse yew.
A thistle lasts. Whitman's
Grashalme picked up in Latvia,
beads of amber running through your fingers.
I have all the names right,
why can't I make them speak?

1 September 2008

TRAITORS

Those of us who made the '60s
and we all did
failed all the rest of us.
Turned it into style and money,
turned all that pure impurity
into dull commodity
and sold it to the young
we suddenly no longer were.
It keeps them busy, buying
memorials of what never was.

1 September 2008

= = = = =

Do something with this.
Tell a tailor
to make your coat
big enough to fit
an ocean in
that you can take home,

tell a sailor
to make his sail
out of sheets of light
stained by all our seeing,

let the received images
drive his poor boat
onto the dopy coasts of yesterday.

1 September 2008

SLEEPING

Here as if waiting
or a stone.

Here as if a spoiled child
suddenly sleeps.

Are we all the same sleep?

My mother said and it saddened me
that I was a good child but only when asleep.

What is the matter with the day
that sleep should be so holy in the dark?

Maybe if we slept all the time
the other dream would make us good.

Or maybe knowing this waking stuff
is dream life too, as the sages say,

but what would knowing that do for us,
a dream begotten on a dream and never wake?

Or is it wake enough to say I'm dreaming?

Reality (= Otherness perceived)
asks more of me than that.

I need to be somebody to it.
(In day forget dream, in dream forget day).

Do better than that, must be.
For the sake of everybody else,

for the chipmunk among the irises.
For the worm you saw the chipmunk eat.

If I ever wake I wake for you.

2 September 2008

BODY

This little bit of clay
I borrow
or someone borrows
to make me

to speak or move
I call my “own”
and no right to it,
no more mine

than yours
I live here
lord of a lost island
only you can find.

Inferences:

1. That the body does not belong to any self – my body doesn't belong to me.
2. There is a deep ownership this casual identity dissembles, conceals, betrays.

2 September 2008

SALT

I cannot be anywhere
I should not be.

It is an ocean,
isn't it, or isn't it
like one, like water, like salt,

like people living inside you
quietly so you never know

so you are never alone.

Salt. Salt is so sure
of itself and you, it knows
the boundary. Salt
is in charge of edges, cubes,
cell walls, membranes,

drunkenness. Memory.
Salt is memory.
The undissolved. Dregs
of what has been
still thick in the bosom of the hour.

Now. We are sick with resemblances.

But I look like nothing and nothing looks like me.
Could be almost a song but
no, don't sing. There is enough pain without music.

A few ideas and then
again as if a word
had edges too,

salt sequences, the path
of moonlight over calm sea—

who walks along it?
Who is coming to me now?

Be natural if you can't
be what you are.

heart's footprint, old wall,
and never far from Egypt,

a map of mind before the sand.

Lotus of the Delta
grown from the unknown interior
the Nile its stem,

that river was the spinal fluid
and the sea was the brain's womb
of what would be

And we walk around with a womb in our heads
a world the brain itself is fetus of
and when will that child be born?

Will the brain become geography
or just one more thoughtful sea
rimmed with old cities and a whole new sky?

3 September 2008

= = = = =

Is it an old man pregnant with his death?
The things we see!

Like a catapult come hurling
or a cup spills.

We make it all so complicated with deferrals
but it is smooth enough in its own time.

Be waiting. But do something
while you wait. That is the way.

3 September 2008

OF MARIGOLD THE VULNERARY

How I learned to be anything is to say.

A witch in her own cool cauldron,
waiting.

I am the only athanor.

The alchemist always knows it is
himself herself.
Only the own body, no other flower.

The dew falls, rises, on his skin,
his hair drenches with dawn's nostoc settling,

he bears the influence.

He doesn't love some as much as others.
This is right.

The sun told him
and the nibbled marigold,

*I wounded the hillside
but the blood ran out of me.*

White blood.

He wrote an e-mail to the witch:
"a chipmunk pattered on my porch,
there was a breeze,

why do I so like being lonely?
Being alone is like touching your skin.”

He stamped his foot, chipmunk vamoosed.

How can anything begin this way,
is it a fever?

No, it is spacious
and will be luminous
later, when it is the only light

given and to give.

He thinks: That is why men have pockets,
because they forget.
Women always remember.

But no answer came.

A colicky pain, but a cool breeze.

A thing with the look of another thing—
things trying to be something else—

the masked ball.

The ink-stained underwear
of the prom queen – but how . . . ?

A car is always a question
isn't it. Alas, alas,
a road is no answer.

(Had she said that to him?
Was he awake even now?)

Marigold, a vulnerary.
The bishop's tears heal stone.
Lettuce seed brings torpor

somnolent afternoons of theory.

Don't you see,
sleep is a kind of allergy.

4 September 2008

OLD BOOK

The ink has faded, the paper darkened.
Word and emptiness come close to each other,
figure becomes less and less distinct from ground.
The text elapses into silence.

The page tends to shred as you turn it,
the corners chip and flake away,
beneath the page you're reading
a little fleet of triangles assembles,

the chipped-off corners of the leaves you've read.
Soon everything will be gone
except the word when you've read it.
And even that you'll forget

but you'll remember the feel of reading it,
the evening breeze coming across the Firth,
a young man doubting his journey to the north.
Chapter Two. Sir Walter Scott. *The Antiquary*.

4 September 2008

BUCKTHORN

Can such things be
and the black
berry on it,
rugged, impending, *Rhamnus*.

Cherish this gaunt tree
nobody likes it,
the oil man curses it
when it grazes the rim of his tanker
and the mower calls it my witch tree.

I wish, I think, a witch
in my garden!
And at night when I walk about
sometimes drifts her hands across my head,

startling me. But the night itself
is made of failed explanations.

5 September 2008

ROSA RUGOSA

What is found in the rosebush,
would I not give a prize for that,
all the little gold I thought I held

because the way it changed the time
you, when you plucked rugosa from the dark

a wild rough rose fed by the sea

and you brought the pale red thing landward

like a maiden saved from the rip-tide
or an old man plucked from the cliff,

we are saved by what we see

Seven old books lying on the sand
one drenched one dry and five
degrees of damp

and read open the wettest of them now

a plump cotillion
and the girls in chains
a weathered sparrow
rustles under ivy

am I right O Lord
to call this poetry?

Close your book and spit out sand
the sea-drift carried to your lips—

that too is –if not poetry itself,
then *poeterei*, what poets do,

kissing, sucking, spitting, spewing
and the sand comes out and decorates the page

as once the blood of martyred men
seeded a church no man remembers

Every ink stain a revelation.
Every syllable the Testament complete.
Every single word a separate Bible..

What did he mean by this, Father?

I suppose he meant: Look at a word
then sound it, then listen to the echoes
in your mind of what it said,

hollow head, vault of heaven, dome,
o tall calvarium
a bird cries down the sky.

And all the shadows of the sound
cast down around us,

and every single word
explicitly or by implication tells

the whole story of what all language could,
nothing is left out of anything that actually is.

5 September 2008