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PARIS VAUT BIEN UNE MESSE

And if this is a storm
what is peace?

All those bells!

Like a Waterloo
of mud and thick books,
campaign ribbons pinned to your chest,

Comma, o well-loved link
letting all my things dance together
and still go home alone, dear Comma
that lets a list arise
like deer stepping out of the woods
this wet morning on our scant lawn
to nibble my new yew tree
beloved of such thin-shanked cattle
with such serenity in their eyes

only their legs know flight—
like words in the dictionary
they do not change their spelling
when they run away from me.
white flirtation of brisk tails

then the woods are just woods
and nobody talks.

Except you.

Except me.

Was Paris worth it,
Henry, to pretend an act of worship
to please the potent worshippers
white God was far away
running with the deer

triune, invisible, not even a flash of white
except that host up there
the ditzy clergy lift for your inspection
and give you a bite of later,

with musics, your heart
hears it,

yes
even your comma-bracketed royal heart
is in your mouth

as they say
to taste the undeniable
god in your lips, dissolving on your tongue,

to choose this music, Majesty,
was Paris worth it, really, a dirty city
full of human meanings,
scummy with memories,
o I could tell you, Majesty,

I have lived in your vast palace
longer than you,

all history

mixed together here
my fifty years,

years are nothing,

just shadows of lost bets.

shades of guesses and nothing left,

was it worth it

to have lived again on earth in me,

to take once more

a girl's substantial shoulders in your arms

and try again, again, to find in her kind and frightened eyes

the truth a million years of life

have scribbled deep in your and you never noticed.

but here she is,

her face lifted to you

in proud timidity,

o Christ we all are kings,

we all find in the eyes of someone

just standing there

the riddle of the universe

charlatans have trumpeted all my life

and here it is,

blue-eyed it may be

or amber-eyed,

a question with no answer.

God is what you hold in your mouth,

swallow and try to be sincere,

what else can you do,

God is what you held once in your arms

the ethics of honesty,

city, city,

to keep me honest

a little,

all those sleeping people

humming in my sleep.

25 October 2008

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You see I'm still trying to reckon with the Reformation. It still goes on, the art of making men who love God hate one another. God seems to be an integer that, cancelled out on both sides of the equation, leaves hatred. The Enlightenment was one golden afternoon and now the night is back soon drenched in blood, vespersed with thunder. And we're at it again.

25 October 2008

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I don't understand the single
thing about politics, the secret
mandrake root from which murder
rises and waves its pretty flags.
All I understand is thunder,
real thunder and cannon roar
in every Waterloo, I was listening
to the storm of drums in Strauss's
opera *Daphne* when I began to think
and still am listening to it now,
not yet has the girl become a tree,
the god and the mortal lover still
are striving for her heart, the drums
are finished, the lovers
do not have long to live, never do,
the god grieves all the way back
to heaven, gold and silver, roads
and rivers, banks and hospitals,
the girl is leafy, the music sweet,
I have no grasp of history because
time itself is frisky, sketchy,
and space is no better. Which of us
really fits inside our skin?
Not that things are unreal, real
enough but undependable
totally just like you and me.

25 October 2008

ETUDES

1. *The Werewolf.*

As if there were a reason for it,
Werewolf, you are my heart,
you turn blond in October, take
off your clothes in November, your skin
in January. Why is everything so new?
I thought the world was always old
but us. A river devolving into deltas,
deltas mumbling into the sea.

2. *The Old Friend*

He carried an ebony cane with a cowhorn crook
it was years and years and then it was tonight.
We spoke of Greek things and the music passed—
it was some poem where Cavafy slumped
into sleep after making love at tea-time
and slept without a dream. And left
the silence empty after him. This very one.

3. *The Disappointed*

But where's the wolf?
If ever we wake.
We'd find it waiting.
It will be us.
Or just like us already
because we were bitten
while we slept
by sleep itself.
We always are.
Dream is contagious,
silence frail.

4. *Revenge*

We growl at the mirror
till the glass is misted
by my gruesome breath
then no one can see
and then I can't see
even me or anything
and then I really wake.

25 October 2008

SENTIMENTAL SONNET

Then there's the tree that has just turned
glossy red as the big red-purple 5
on the back of the new five-dollar bill
Vyt gave me to add to the tip
in the Bangladeshi curry house that I
wanted to pass in the diner to the waitress
later, later, the one with a greasy fingerprint
left on her uniform where some other
customer bolder than I had
touched her on the hip, but I didn't,
saved it in memory of Vyt and Kim
because things have occasions of their own
we're really not allowed to mess with.
I think it's some Asian kind of maple.

26 October 2008

EDUCATIONAL SONNET

Can it at least answer be
to strategic questions? Sneeze,
water the coelacanth, all that history
will make an ocean thirsty.

My planet, my crimson harvester!
Every joke is really about death
the doctor said, all you have to do
is analyze it all the way. But I

a man of werewolf manners and
fashionable teeth pervade
anthologies of poetry – your own
children learn me in school

and love to dream of my caresses
while their teachers dream nothing at all.

26 October 2008

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But who did that to the night
so that the tree I uprooted
and burned for the light to read
a lost book by
would still stand there at morning?

26 October 2008

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Running in the city
depends on corners,
bless corners where
contradictory winds
roar from both sides
and your forwardness
caress deeper than skin.

26 October 2008

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Sometimes better not to look.

Marks on my hand
time's abstract tattoo
non-objective they used to say

sailcloth and no sea, no wind,
no boat, almost no me.
Dull stars in a dead sky.

Marx on my hands still there
to tell the truth of time's
amassing and all our local
piracies. A tachiste pilgrimage.

Sometimes I think skin is the only soul we have.

26 October 2008

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Write till there's no
blue left in the sky
then write with black
until the moon comes out
dissolving all my certainties.
A tree? Is that my path?
Always one more
word to decode. Something
round and white happening
while I try to wake, can't,
sleep on, hold tight
the name of the thing I saw:
moonrise in the poem.

26 October 2008

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Casting a certainty hails whom?
The Wash. Stretched out beyond.
Some need rivers through the neatest now,
scouring the adverse mud below,
be nice now, don't spoil. Picnic
on the moon, I gave you deep
permission to be anything
just by thinking so.

Draft

invades your clothes. Rain
does all my laundry, and cotton
all my memory work at school.
Sheep learn our ABCs. And then
Kentucky, little hilly rolling green
not the gaunt coal measures
but this clean hand. Some people
even like what they do:

economic miracle a job you like
in dignity and troth, five carats
at least and get your knuckle kissed.
Any more would be a magazine,
a powder keg left out in the rain,
the self-same water, doctor,
every now and then I have the urge

to shout out “Portugal!” but mostly
just write it down and that relaxes.

What is the matter with me?

What sex are you? Can’t you tell
from my handwriting. No, they sent me
your enquiry by e-mail transcription
so what kind of a person are you?

I am one who cries words in the street,

I rush up to them and say Balsamo!

But you know me as Cagliostro!

And they something smile and something
look away. So you’re a man then?

Then and always, or else the magazine
was wrong I wrote to for help.

Do they all end in vowels? You’re no
help at all, Portugal ends in L,

I end in vowels all the time but never
do I say them, not even now,

just letters on a page, like sheep on the hillside
each word content with the grass beneath its feet.

27 October 2008

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Love does it – promises I can't fulfill.
Drive over the hills to Millerton
and have a coffee and a currant scone
and sit there pretending to read a book.

But all the while let seep up inside me
the angular influence of that different geology,
hill and upthrust and cloven dales—
I bet there's gold here but I'll never tell.

Other breakfasters observe me as I them
with compunction and detachment,
ocular civility. I drown in sugariness,
the place reeks of sugar and cassia,

o Keziah of my Bible days, fragrant
daughter of somebody, I came here
for the rock and ore, thou art too soft
for me, soft Cinnamon, soft cheek.

27 October 2008

CONSULTING THE SPECIALIST AT LAST

Lessons learn me. A spring
of Easter darkness
waiting for my tree. My toes
are still in mud. The actual
dreams (rough tweed old wooden
cabinets with many drawers
a man who heard me say pens
thought I'd said pins – but he
wasn't from *Dinver* at all but
Roanoke, Virginia – and brought
out a tray of old eyeglasses
we both seemed to think were pins,
most of them tortoise shell but
one small rimless pair sat
on my nose and blurred my sight
at first then fit perfectly
my eyes and what they saw)
are more interesting than
the fiction I make up, pray
Dr Sacks why is that?
Because your neurons have
a Messiah of their own
you haven't welcomed yet
into your *thoughtless* heart

where habit holds her revels.
One room is full of Turners,
one of Botticellis, the heart
can't tell the difference
anymore when Wagner plays
and Bellini melts your thought
into intricate marblings of breath—
I have no medicine for you,
it's always sunrise in your heart,
weird lengthening shadows, mists,
aureoles, adventuresses, mincing does.
Or it's sunset – you decide. Only
the numbers lie, the shadow's true.

28 October 2008

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This is the cold lovely rain
that takes the leaves away
and leaves wood light,
the surgeon rain that clarifies the wood
and lets the light heal
our hidden ground.

28 October 2008