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.... RUBAIYAT

LX.

When we were born fire was still new,  
Had just been improvised. We knew  
No better than to cook our food  
And warm our dens – what fools we were!

LXI.

The animal part just wont go away—  
It bites and snuggles, gets wet and dry  
And falls asleep over the pages of this book  
Or else wakes up boasting I am the lord of pain.

LXII.

If only you could live on contour,  
On the shapes of things as we live on music,  
The lines we see and the lines we hear  
Enough – and no one ever need to touch.

LXIII.

Because sunrise really happens inside  
And the sky is just a mirror to our minds,  
Let the light pour out so other folk can see,  
The way a lover murmurs: Wake up for me.

LXIV.

Am I there yet? Is the water on my skin  
The river I intended? Does the shadow on my face  
Fall from the hill I have been looking for?  
When does feeling turn into knowing? And he laughed.

LXV.

Why does landscape always make me feel so blind?  
So much to see and all of them at once.  
A view from a hill is like eighty years of life,  
A thousand hands outstretched to touch me.

LXVI.

Poets only understand about men—  
So every woman *is* an island, John,  
But there is no sea. No tragedy.  
No bleating billygoat trying to sing.

LXVII.

All I meant to do, I did. A stream  
Full of water runs round my little house  
And I've made full sets of leaves for every tree.  
Everything has been said. What am I listening for?

LXVIII.

If I were a kingdom it would be something else—  
All the rivers would run backwards, clouds  
Would walk on human feet and mountains sink.  
But I'm just the woods I long ago got lost in.

LXIX.

Have you read the Ramayana?  
Have you stood below the dome of Saint Sophia?  
Have you studied the Missa Solemnis?  
But I saw a red leaf topple from a maple.

LXX.

So every poem is a translation  
To begin with from another language,  
One we were born hearing and all our lives  
Struggle letter by letter to learn. To speak.

LXXI.

For every language is a second language  
That sometimes silences a lost original,  
Your hair resting on my shoulder,  
A crow upset outside, sun trying to wake up.

LXXII.

All we have to do is translate the translation.  
Lermontov stands up and spits the bullet out,  
Shelley swims ashore. Nothing is finished  
But everything is done. God bless us everyone.

LXXIII.

Who knows enough to look away from me?  
I am the magician with a tarnished mirror,  
My cards are sticky, my rabbit dead.  
They look me in the eye and lose reality.

8 November 2008

..... RUBAIYAT

LXXIV.

What could I have done to help the angel?  
I barely understood he or she was near me,  
Just heard the breath down in my mind  
And words that were not mine made me speak.

LXXV.

There was no sense in what I said, all the sense  
Was in the silence that chose to answer me.  
Help me, I heard, help me be, help me be  
As empty as you are and suddenly I was.

8 November 2008

= = = = =

When it comes time to talk of the death  
Of those who have no business dying,  
Lovers, parents, friends, we are impatient.  
That bleak door is supposed to open only in—

We are incredulous, annoyed, determined  
To keep everything just as it is. A will  
Means determination to go on. Testament  
Means living witness to all they know.

How can we live without how they know us?

8 November 2008

= = = = =

If there were something could a second be?  
Querisome category, fireplace flicker.  
Is it cold enough for a fire? Why does it?  
And things sound so ridiculous at home  
When you actually say them and a man  
Is sure about his own name but what about you  
Don't you have some rights too  
To spell or not to spell, to look at birds  
Through the window or go outside and see them  
Though then they may get scared away.  
Like friends when the camel bells clank out  
And we know it's time to hang the moon up  
And hurry into the shadows where we sleep.

8 November 2008

## JAPANESE RITUAL DANCES

1.

Turn it so ON is on top  
before you plug it in  
then the message will come out right—

your character, accurate as ever  
and neat as a muscle,  
will be like a tight ship in one  
of those eighteenth century metaphors  
about states and statesmen and  
(this is what's important)  
you will sleep now. Sleep Arizona sunset,  
wake up in Vermont,  
everybody is a mountain walking past your bed:

show me. Show me how it's done.

2.

The place where men plant peas.  
What exactly is sorghum anyway  
and could I tell you if I knew?

I am generous with my information,



it's the mud I swine around in,  
here's some for you: the privilege  
of the hypotenuse is equal  
to some of the fugues on the other nine themes  
but which?

Lead me to your thalamus at last  
where all the silly conjugations lead  
and leave a lady  
asleep in her suppose.

I always leave the answer  
so plainly writ you think it's the question.

3.

o you and me, you and me  
what a sexy game of rain the larder—  
a Sufi person on the top shelf lodges,  
I hear the click of amber beads the hum of zikr  
sometimes in the wallboard from the other side

where what I thought was me was sleeping.  
But my sleep was only a dream.

No, you say, it is a ship yourself  
under full sail, on a wild sea  
beating through the straits of semaphore—

o there's no such place, no sea,  
go back to sleep,  
knowing there is no such sign.

4.

Work your way into the sweater put it on  
how many yards of yarn to knit one  
degree of early winter morn away  
so you can know the day?

Lover, she tells me,  
it is Sunday – numbers are much too holy  
to use for counting things or reckoning—  
  
numbers are for worship – kneel  
before the sanctity of sevenness  
and I will be your deaconess and you be glad.

5.

Then the church was empty.  
The hanged man had  
been dragged (or dragged  
himself) over the hill

and left in the deep leaves  
for vultures and foxes  
as he instructed.

His books were carried off  
and catalogued by nearby scholarship,  
the spilled wine and lamb fat wiped up,  
his thin rope unwrapped from the transom.

And all of a sudden it was just  
as if he had been dead all the time,  
or else a tall mirror in a furrier's salon  
waiting for the skin to speak again.

6.

It's all right things keep starting—  
can you feel the politics on its way,  
the smell of it on my hands?

The brave policeman walks the lonely moon,  
governments are bliss-inhibitors, that's all,

yet those who trim our pleasures get  
no pleasure from their cut.

There is a caste of men who think they're born  
to tell other people what to do  
and there's another caste to make them do it.

Without them the rest of us could stroll around  
finding things and giving things to each other  
all the livelong day and sleep deep  
without the prattle of dismal instructors

and when we woke we'd have new dreams to share.

9 November 2008

= = = = =

All music is about Russia  
Every river is the space between your own legs—

You think I don't understand the dance  
Just because I stand  
Motionless against the wall  
Counting the bricks with my shoulder blades

My poor lost wings  
I fly back through the wall  
I fly backwards through every solid thing,

All music is trying to describe Russia  
The trees and factories of it, the bleak of season,  
Torrid wheat fields and the shadows  
Of hawks swoop down on alders by the stream

And every river flows inside your skin  
And finds a way and finds a way

The dance leaps up into the air sometimes the dancer follows.

9 November 2008

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They think I don't understand them out there,  
they think I speak all kinds of languages, I don't  
all I can speak is what I hear  
when I listen hard between the collar and the skin

the dialect of sweat and the decent grammar of dirt  
because we're all in this together  
and you can do something about it  
but first you have to do something about me

you have to listen to me hard, hard  
until the beauty of your listening faces  
makes me shut up, and then I'll know, and you'll know,  
and the only thing that can help us is what we make up,

close your ears and listen inside then speak what you hear—  
there is no other way and no other universe to be in.

9 November 2008

[THESES PRONOUNCED IN DREAM]

Silent meetings to interrupt God.

\*

Those who speak  
    permit us to speak.

Those who keep silence  
    permit us to hear.

\*

No part of no.

\*

10 November 2008

## SIGNS

1.

But went to bed earlyish  
didn't fight  
even though the day Knife was coming in

and we have come to understand those things—  
as the four beautiful days after Obama's election  
are auspices for his four years ahead.

*Tendrel.* Good signs.

2.

Let the car barns (ghost lots) in Eliot  
keep the ghosts of the old cars (trolleys)  
under the stifling brightness of new real estate.  
The sign in the agency window  
read REALITY GOO when I first saw it  
and I felt it dripping from my hands.

3.

And underneath these Quaternary bones  
an ancient world still waiting—  
just the least slippage and we're through.

10 November 2008



## **NOVEMBER STREET**

Sunlight on two students  
bent under backpacks  
trudge like old coolies  
bowed down by education  
there are still some  
leaves on some of the trees.

10 November 2008

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The fire in the grate  
is the image of something else.

Clouds coming, darker and darker, out of the west.

Things are the shadows of ideas, he said.  
Smoke going up from our tired wood.

10 November 2008

= = = = =

Recorded mystic  
a dance around  
in whose hands

that dance the -er  
from secant to  
secant of

what kind of rim  
has only one  
name in it

no numbers at  
all just wave  
not even rain?

(late autumn)  
10 November 2008

