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DAWN

The people who knew my night
by hand, mine, blue dome
in Samarkand, one more as if
to live through to the end.
As if an elephant were walking
down my breath, Indian,
caparisoned as such beasts are
when deployed to make a rajah glad
who had been moping in alabaster
pavilions about some pet in politics.

Still I can breathe. Still the weather
renews its growingly implausible
conversation with us imaginers,
the ones who fancy we are the same
day after day. Weather is a mirror,
darling, that's why it features
prominently in all my dispatches,
I mount it on the wall of my discourse
so you can see yourself in it, bright,
rather beautiful, and in the shadows
me behind you, touching, in fact,
just like the dream. Or like this light
butting into the trees to say it's time
for one more day. Time to change.

25 February 2007

= = = = =

What is strength? Image inside image.
Like that Lucy McKenzie painting
of a woman eating her calm dinner
under a painting behind her that
shows what she is thinking, not
calmly, obscenely, startling, in Dutch.

25 February 2007

= = = = =

How much measuring
before the wood is ready?
Already it fits almost
perfectly inside the tree.

But nothing is ever 100%.
That's why we represent it
an infinity symbol struck
by lightning, %, the loops
of us springing apart
presumably forever in
the immeasurable forest
so we spend the rest
of our lives trying to
match the wood grains together.

25 February 2007

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Prairie companion: a wolf.
Into the base of the elm tree
healing antibiotic cones
have been jammed.
Against the blight.
Or a moon over grassland
promising something.
These things that come
to mind, are just the mind.

25 February 2007

THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT PETER

Fortunate disagreement with the authorities
takes Peter out of bed. Nothing is calm
once you start to doubt the ordinary,

once you listen to a man who somehow
seemed more than a man. Once you travel
from place to place telling about it

sharing your bright confusion with the world
city by city. Of course they're going to notice,
to get even, even, when they get around to

crucifying you some summer day they'll
do you upside down to let you know they've gotten
some part of what you were trying to explain.

25 February 2007

THE STRANGE COMPANIONS

And who were these
arrayed like washerwomen
at the weir, where water
ran quickest, spared them
some labor at the rinse?

They were our fathers,
Masons to a man, content
with leaving us hints here and
(more often) there to tell
how when we are thoughtful

we might find. But what it is
we're looking for in fact
the current long ago flushed away.

25 February 2007

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But these are surface excitements

like a slap or a kiss. A book
is deeper than all that, though it still
helps to have fingers to read it.

Leafing pages. As if you were the wind.
And the wind could understand
everything it touches. Everything it smoothes.

Do you read me? We lie
so often, but we lie before each other
also, spread open, asprawl like words.

25 February 2007

=====

It is good to be halfway somewhere,
even home. A cold bright morning
I've supervised all the way from dawn.
Till now. When you see this message
in your hand, and wondered how I dared to care.

25 February 2007

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When they see
they see.
But what.

What do they do.
What they see
to do is what they see

then what they do.
Who are they who,
who?

—25 February 2007

OLIM COLUERAM

or song
the lost things
sing

*

if it were lake, light.

It doesn't tell me.
It is a spirit, bound
to intersect our passages.

Paysages: landscapes.
A landscape
is a burden, a thing you have finally to do.

Holzwege, errant
pathways through the wood.

*

A flute is the easiest
way to forget, shepherd.

Long glide of a tone
down. Evening coming.

*

Ware wolves.
Every octave ends in one.
Open maw.
Everything you ever knew
swallows.

*

Now a Wednesday is a middle day
even now on Sunday.
Every day has Wednesday in the middle,
middle of itself. Mercredi,
lean and nimble, rules over it,
our littlest world.

*

Sleep embed in word
word embed in silence

the mind must be flexible
be liable. The mind is liable.

*

Untie the sky
& let it down
string by string till
all that light
wreathes your head

even the smallest piece
competes infinity

*

Sometimes the word hides.
The trouble with music
Skryabin made much of it:

a single tone is a fixed smile.
A tone is a mask.
A key pressed on the keyboard
is terrible. Frightening.

The thought of it
almost worse than the sound.

*

The sadness of the piano:

one hand dances
one hand just remembers.

*

O my father the roll
one time of your piano
the brown monkscloth
of your Irish jokes
the candleflame of your cigar,
the windows lit up by your green eyes!

*

Teaching water to skip stones.
A pine tree with no snow flakes in it.
A tree without snow.

*

What do we care about stars?
They are plows, just like the old days.
Or sows, even older. It blazes
in autumn, sneezes in winter,
sneezes in springtime. Swings.
And summer is a long, long river
that no one ever swims in, ever.

*

Hum in your hand.
Pluck a white dove
out of empty sky.

*

The tattoo washes off in the rain.
The face goes next,
Finally a bone is all alone.
Wet ivory but it knows
how to talk. Mostly
what it says is Goodbye.

*

The pedestrian runs out of road.
Soon the ground is a thing of the past.

Sight unseen he prays to the moon
the way we do, *faute de mieux*.

Dubious sky. A dog nearby
probably peaceful. The pedestrian

has a letter in the deepest pocket
read once too many times already.

*

Holding close
what has no together

a chain of flowers,
exhausted lovers fast asleep.

25 February 2007
(during Da Capo concert at Olin)

= = = = =

Being the way through
something is a course
you run but I stand
still, my shadow is
the hound at your heels

no more the simple
departures as to be
one another's animal
calling as it might be
at night to its kind

where none are left
of that sort, ears
pelt teeth tail
only the scabbard
left of the sword

it tries to cry in me
as if good-bye
the dumb sincerity
of pain the insidious
lie of being healed.

26 February 2007

OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE

It's always better when you don't know
and let it find you, let it let you know
the weight the tendency of what you feel
but never name it, it's better to walk
in the shade of what it says, and catch
your identity in momentary glimpses
of the shadow that you cast, what you
must be like if words like these
appear in the record, who could you be
if this is what it found you thinking?

26 February 2007

APRES

And after the ceremonies of intimate acquaintance
one beast can lie beside the other and permit
the long knowledge that is time to ripen round them
in them as they sleep. That is all they need.
This is what they meant by being on earth at
the same time as it is said, to share that time
its spurts and leaks and droughts and gushes
to endure each other's perfections as gifts
from Being, greater than god and common as weather.

26 February 2007

THE WEIGHT OF IT

Responsibility also is a habit
the things we had
cling to us still
to be members of us

their wish is our command
I live in the shadows
of all I have done,
a rubble man

infested with fame.
Fama. What people say.
We are killed by conversation.
I wanted to run and hide

but there was no place
I had not been.
The snow that falls so gently now
is last year's snow.

27 February 2007

= = = = =

what we dare
to be clear

the about of lives
around us in us

the snowplow
of the nights

that leaves a scraped
passageway

into the light
inelegant actual

enough.

27 February 2007

A WORD HEARD IN OPERA

what can it be to listen
so close to the small thing
the grain of marble
that when we look close
becomes crystals everything
crystals the air itself
glitters its molecules in us.
Who is this us I keep at,
who is this stone?

gewöhnlich, the usual
is with us like spring weather,
rain and morning
and wet lilacs tossing in the wind

could that be every day?
could now be now?

27 February 2007

= = = = =

His potatoes
will be something special
nourished by
the dead poet
buried in this field.

[as dreamt]
28 February 2007

MY STOCKHOLM SPEECH

[the first hundred words or so were dreamt, then I woke and kept on writing.]

I have a confession. I believe in the Muse.

To do so is to be as unfashionable as those who believe in ghosts, or in God. As implausible as those who believe in the government.

Muse. When I first thought of talking about this today, I closed my eyes, or kept them closed rather, because I was sleeping, and indeed I am speaking to you from a dream, perhaps a very long dream, that holds us all.

At any rate, with closed eyes I opened the dictionary and read: **Muse**. *One of a number of angel-like entities, usually construed as feminine, who preside over various arts and skills, to each of which one Muse has been assigned, as, for instance, Erato, muse of lyric poetry. They are reputed to live atop some mountain, usually Parnassus q.v., or in some well-watered garden at its base. Nine muses are usually counted, their names being...* and so on. I looked up from my book, struck for the first time by these words, embodying as they did only what we have always told ourselves about these angels or divinities. Entities. I thought: *one of a number*. How extraordinary that the definition began with that. The muse is one. But the muse is many, because she (I will persist for a while in using the familiar female pronoun) is of a number. She does, doesn't. exist by herself, but only as a part or number or limb of her sisterhood. A single digit.

The group she belongs to owns or concerns itself not just with what we call arts. Besides Erato stands Clio, muse of history, looking about her. And on the grass lies Urania on her back, gazing into the sky, muse of astronomy, astrology, the measurements of earth and heaven, the mistress of Time. Of *le temps*, as the French say, which means both time and weather, the dance the sky does with the earth. I thought about their names, and understood (I hope with

a kind of reverent skepticism) that these names were what the Greeks or their local predecessors had called them. That is, these were the Muses' Greek names, not their own names, not perhaps the names of their essences. And maybe the familiar names do not even reveal the full range of arts and measures to which each glad lady had been assigned.

But, to be honest, as a confession made in a dream cannot help but be honest, I have thought for most of my life that the muse's true name was 'you.' Wife or friend or some such thing, a known presence with unknown parameters, we live with what we see but there is so much more. The smile on the face of a shadow. 'You.'

Then sometimes I think that 'you' are only a wound the muses make on me. Or that the muses are not other than the mystery of the Other, the mystery of the Other, all the things the other does to me. The other, the vast unknown country that projects its dark angle ever-outward beyond every person, every single one, from which strange place the quiet tilth or rivering energy keeps coming that nourishes artists and scientists into their more or less conscious acts. Deeds. The muses make us do.

I suppose I was being simple. Muses make us do, you make me do, ergo, you are muse. This specious syllogism sustained me over many a wild voyage on the craft that English quaintly calls the relationship. Sustained me though long friendship and swift hostilities, marriage and divorce, stress times and prairie afternoons of lucid calm.

Then I begin to understand. The voice of the other is *any* word I hear speaking. When words start speaking in the head, that is the Muse beginning her expression: squeezing it out of the stored experiences of the writer, out of the writer's ignorance too, out of the language the writer has the honor and

privilege to inhabit. It is the Muse beginning her dictation. Attend. I thought as I was writing this down, lo! she is saying even this.

I hope by the time I come to deliver this speech there will be still a king on the throne of Sweden, so he can tell me whether these matters are different for a king or queen from an ordinary person. I suspect not, but it may be that for me, an ordinary man, the muse, being the Other, in my discourse (if only there) naturally enough assumes a feminine persona, so for a king the Muse might not just be a she, the queen in Drottningholm, the royal concubine if any, the nursemaid he remembers from the gloomy tower, but might in fact be all of you, his people. The king's muse might be *they*, as Paul Claudel supposed, in his Catholic piety, that the muse must be Grace.

Or the muse might be the wound that you leave in my heart, my speaking heart. You, whom old Whitman called by your truest name, "you, whoever you are, holding me now in your hand."

27 February 2007

= = = = =

Arcane weather. Or:
weather is our arcane.
Cloud. Clouds tell.
Winds speak. Memnon
everyone. Even light
is part of it.

Let light
have its say. Doesn't
have to be *splendore*
or even a "little rush light"
even, a match, flashlight
you crank by hand
to light your way
when the car breaks down.

But mostly wind.
To say. And let
explain. By eye
to follow, by skin,
where the wind goes
and know its origin
by feel.

Its messages.
There is weather
for everyone,
blind or dead or dumb
always a sensory
instruction from the weather
comes. The simple heat.
The castle chill.
I feel it in my shoulder
now, the obvious thing
I finally write down
obedient to nothing
more portentous than
my skin and its shivers.
It shivers. But the sun.

28 February 2007

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Then the words can catch her as she falls
the divine interventions of an early supper
silencing the desperate fancies Bovary by
Bovary into the quiet peasant fricassee,
be with me, bondswomen, because you all
belong to your desires, slaves like me,
someone who wants something is never free.

Caught between desired and desired some
times a space opens into quietness, peace
if not contentment, contentment if not
delight, delight if not completion, all
this is still before you, choose not to choose,
the beauty is in the indecision, the love
you want so much is an empty glove

still shaped by the hand you will never
feel again caress your waist or privacies
though the instructive form lasts forever
shaping your understanding of everything
from the weather to classical philology,
this missing feel that you still feel,
that seals you as its own with its faint seal.

28 February 2007

[last scene of *Capriccio*]