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Being close to what isn't even there,
with wings, celebrating mysterious arrivals
like words that suddenly come to mind
or robins that at this season, confused
by the cold light, flash egregiously close
to moving cars, a flash of ruddiness
on the windshield, gone, they're safe
but what was the message they splayed,
phone rings I answer I listen I talk
I listen some more I hang up I forget
it's all some bird flickering past
as if the whole world rubbed its eyes
and saw those whirling lights
Gerrit tells me are called phosphenes
he says make spirals but I never
saw anything but distant stars
blue as Jupiter on the Tarot card,
a sleeping man of middle years, strong,
his chest heaving quietly in dream.

9 April 2007

POEM BEGINNING WITH A MISREADING

of & for George Stanley

That's when you realize your brain is not you,
not you or George Starkey or Edward Kelly
who also are you, and often not you,
and the brilliant
wind slices the meager uplift of the new blue-eyed
squills on our frozen lawn, *Squilla siberica*
as like as not, but who can tell, cultivars
make little *histoires* of their own,
so this stuff
keeps coming up to be remembered
an insistent mid-morning headache
for which no aspirin of focused forgetting
has ever been patented,
this glass
that has no sides from which I must drink,
borneless, the battle.

... 9 April 2007

2.
Or encased in startlement how the ferry churns
an affable wake reluctant to leave shore
so half an hour along the sea you look
back to find an ever-widening triangle
expanding its limbs to embrace your origin,
something like that, a boat, a sea, a wind
fresh in every sense invades your skin
and that's not how coffee is supposed to taste
and this piece of bread is not the real bread
and that steeple fanging up from the peninsula
is not the real church not the real people

the real people are the gulls
you think and you are wrong.

So wrong. Wrong as a boat can be.

3.

So that too is a kind of smattering of it,
guesses and soft leather shoes, Mexican word,
can't get it now, a pulpit to declare out loud
and to a self-appointed rabblement
my musical confusions, listen!
Or espadrilles. Canvas snug on Paul Blackburn's feet.

4.

But music keeps saying it, what.
But we keep listening, who.
But they keep explaining, why.
But questions fall from the sky.
There are two creatures in this jungle:
Me and I. Must escape them with my life.

10 April 2007

5.

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Sometimes the word wakes up first,
sometimes the man. Then how alone.
Morning is. Unspecified.
Clouds, but they could be on their way
anywhere else. Nothing is here.
To be silent is a sin, a salvation.
Bricklayer logic rules his life.
One more, one more until the sky.
Or something falls. Sometimes
it does fall. Sometimes though
it is just gone when he wakes up.

9 April 2007

BETWEEN THE DUELLISTS

Stop the bullet in mid-flight
and talk to it, talk does wonders
and not an animal in sight.

Baby Lead, let it pass this time.
Miss. Let the bumptious scoundrel
or the wounded paramour escape

unscathed this once. Nobody
has to die to prove you can kill.
Spend your targetry in pure flight,

escape into the experienced air
and spend yourself till you fall
quiet, cool at last on some nice grass.

A child will pick you up and bring you home,
you'll sit on his windowsill and eat the light—
Saturn made you for such work as this.

10 April 2007

THE QUIET FACE OF SOMETHING GONE

Use easy words to say so
the tomato in the butchershop
looks sinister, my right hand
wants to squeeze it hard

shake hands with death for once
and look him in the eye, he has
beautiful eyes but his hands
feel weird, crumbs of every

bread you ever ate stick now
to his brittle palms.
I want to squeeze that fruit
until it bursts all over me

somehow healed by its somehow blood.

12 April 2007

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But here's what they do in other countries:
they choose the prettiest girls to be priests
and make them live in trees, to each tree an owl,
each owl trained to speak one cheerful psalm.
Then every morning the people come and stand
worshipful at the tree's base, looking up
into that mixture of girl and song and weather
which is all these simple people know of the world.
The rest of the day priests wander as they please.

12 April 2007

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All the places that I've been this life
now I understand there's only been
one place ever that I've been,
standing near the white stupa at Sherab Ling
staring up past the golden spire at the blue sky.
Spring in the foothills. Purple jacaranda blossoms
and on the far peaks snow. Down below
is Bajnath, big town, with the old Hindu temple
full of monkeys color of the stone they live on,
where Tilopa used to sit all day long
grinding sesame seeds on a big stone metate
I bent down and pressed by head against,
hoping to have squeezed out of me
every image but this. The quiet stone.

. . . . 12 April 2007

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Can't we make love into the simplest fold
like the linen unwrapped from the risen one
laid aside, can't we make love and lay love aside
and lie beside the only one we mean to say
when it is the only and we fold into place
as if we were our very selves who do this thing
only selves can do and you would be me?

This is half the house I meant to make,
a snowflake settling down to earth not landed yet
all the time in the world to make contact
and none made, all the skin in the world
to press together with some other and none found.
When the snowflake falls against the hellebore's
white greenish flower suddenly it's done.

12 April 2007

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But what was happening there
the blue thing
the thing with holes in it
light showed through

was it a thing or was it a place
could we go?

Could we go?
Silk flowers tin buckets dry.
Dry savages waiting in the sea.
I saw the reef again and it was me.

So forth. The film
you never saw, starring Rge Esire
and Oft Welt. Lived there for time.

Time is all they had there, did you?
Speechifying politicians with pompadours
were not the worst of it the worst
was affable blondines with rigid ambitions
but flexible views. The news.

. . . 12 April 2007

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but what kind of time is it,
like grass or stone, blood or bone
or is it liquid in a different way
like ancient Roman grass
still a little green still flowing
a millimeter in a century
like earth like us

don't think

I was born when I was born
I have another skin at home
a flag a pedigree a bowl of coins
from a country that has never been,
the eyes of my mother
silent as a church in summer

the stiff air the warmth the polished wood.

12 April 2007

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Like a wake
in almost total darkness
after dreams of a royal wedding
where we, in dream's
bright somehow, were
friends of the pretty young queen-to-be
hence honored guests
among the hundreds of.
And there we were in Heathrow
waiting the planes to take us
in the full round of the royal progress—
hearing the weather reports
hurricanes all over the world
especially here and Europe,
everywhere in fact, the young
Queen said with a smile,
everywhere but where Robert wants to be,
at home. America in peace.
And at the moment the doorbell rang
three times to wake me
and I rose. 4:38 AM
and no one there.
In what country
did those bells ring?

12/13 April 2007

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Walking around the house in darkness
fearing who might be there, outside
pressing on the glass to see me,
or inside already, always, quietly
keeping out of my path,
noisy footsteps of an old house.

Where was this fear waiting
to which I succumb, now,
sheltering in the littlest light,
every sound a rat scratch
in the walls or worse?

12/13 April 2007

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I think I have faltered in my practice.
The poem, only the poem counts!
Serves. Serves you. And saves me
from the terrible silence where bells ring
only I can hear and no one comes.

12/13 April 2007

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The scrape of pen on paper
terrifies me quietly.
(Old Indian fountain pen I keep dipping
in Hilton Weiss's government formula ink
made for me a year ago, listen!)

I mean that as an absolute,
the sound of word
inscribing itself
leaving the mind and entering matter,
that other kind of mind.

12/13 April 2007

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How much did I have to learn
to forget so much? O dawn, please come,
talk to me in the persuasive rhetoric of light.
What is this fear? What makes me think
I am entitled to this terror?

“Night Thoughts” come later.
What it is that comes before thought?
Fear.

Fear is the beginning of language,
wisdom’s house
built of the parts of speech.

12/13 April 2007

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So many books in the spare bedroom
they could make a bible of me yet.
Guest room, I call it. But who is here?

12/13 April 2007

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Cauldron of plenty.
From which worry comes
and brute anxiety.
And each warrior is stuck
with the single dread
his fork makes contact
with and he hoists out.

12/13 April 2007

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Could there be
another me here
who woke me,
who stands at my side?

12/13 April 2007