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THE ELDERS

1.

Because the light invaded the caserne
where the donkey smugglers played euchre
with the customs officers
we took our business to the far side of the mountain
where cars were fewer and the cats
kept slatey lizards busy or at bay.

2.

We tried to sell the sun,
mortgage the moon, bottle air.
We were good at what we did,
the practice of spirited deception
turns out to be good for the wind,
we last almost forever, compared
at least to lowlanders who lose it
constantly over trivia like religion
or falling in love. Hence die young.

3.

While we can still remember Caesar
sending his minions through lavender
scuttling to find a tenting place
since every night he slept a different
field under a one-time-only pattern
of influential stars that came to focus
in such places. We can find one of the
few of them left for you. For a price.

13 April 2007

= = = = =

Who are these characters
who people my words?

Are they sleeping while I think?
Or is what I call thinking
just their busy serenade,

calling ridiculous ideas to one another
I solemnly try to notate or refute?

It's like an opera in my head without the music
so writing is the only silence that I know.

13 April 2007

= = = = =

You don't have to find it, it finds you.
You find yourself in the inner aspect of the gate
and there you are.

It is the light that brings you.
The days grow longer if no warmer
and you come.

14 April 2007 (dreamt)

FRACTURE

Didn't we use to have gorilla glue
to heal such breaks as this?
what were we thinking of in the store

we forgot all the really important stuff
just looking at all the bright things
and brought home little of what we need

or they make us need, who, what
were we thinking when we forgot the glue
the tamarind the conductor's baton

the alphabet blocks to teach the cat to read?
I go to the pantry and there's only bread
and milk in the ice box and no ice.

We have come to the country where cactuses
sing, and children are afraid of birds
and birds are afraid of everything.

14 April 2007

ELEGY ON THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN
14 APRIL 1865

He was wrong. He did wrong.
He invented a thing called a Union
where there had been only people.
He said: no, you are not free,
you are not a democracy,
you belong to a republic, a Public
Thing but not a people's thing.
You belong to the Union
and the Union belongs to me.

He was wrong. The secret nature
of his aspiration was imperial.
You see it in his Memorial in D.C.:
an emperor seated in his deep throne.
All the other presidents had chairs
he has a throne. Only an emperor
who owns a country would dare
to say to the people actually living in it
no, you are not free, to secede
from one another, you must stay
where I put you, or where you were born.
It is God's plan, or my plan, surely
they are the same. He was wrong.

But still. To kill him. Not good,
not good to kill a man while he sat
laughing for once at somebody
else's fantasies in the theater, maybe
it wasn't so wrong, to let him go out
on the wave of simpler images,
simpler aspirations than those in his head
that his assassin, though speaking Latin,
rightly called those of a tyrant.
His assassin was one of those people
actually living in the country.
We have rights too, he must have thought,
we live here, we associate with whom
we wish, we move where we want,

because we are people actually
living here, on the ground, not in a book,
a lawcourt, an emperor's brain,
we live in a place, we are actually

living in a place, o woe to the actual
when a man of principle
decides he knows better than we do
what people should call themselves
or where they should go or who
should represent them in congress.

He wounded the president and the president
died. The president had wounded the people
and the people more or less survive,
hating each other more than ever, the white
hate the black, the two poles of the compass
hate each other, every single person of the
people actually living in the country
and all of their children live in curious
unfathomable unhealable quiet rage and
resentment. Only the immigrants the free
people who poured in from elsewhere,
Jews and Chinese and Latinos, they
have strange resentments from far away
that dwindle here and leave them the only
ones free of our local resentments, they save
the rest of the people, immigration
was the answer to union, come in, all
of you, come in and change us, they came
and they did and now they are us more
and more so that they begin to become
people actually living in the country
and they count, they are slowly making
the country into a country again but the wound
festers in our colors and our ridiculous
state flags and loyalties. He did it,

the dead man in the memorial, brooding,
they always call it brooding, glad or sad
at what he has done to the people, forcing

them to live in a union. No divorce, no art
of separation. Stuck together because he
who wants to rule must glue together
as subjects what had been once upon
people actually living in the country.
And the poor actor made his point,
fumbled his lines, stumbled off the stage
using the wrong language, wrong instrument,
right idea, but he had a glimpse, he would have,
of course an actor, only an actor
ever sees through the lines of the play
to the pale light of reality glimmering
far away through the imperialist
nightmare of that Union so many men
and women died to preserve, they died
to save their chains, their prison, they
forgot at last that once you start a war
it never ends, a war is forever, it still
eats us, still breaks out year after year,
here, there, always trying to use
the same old cunning violences learned
from a crazy old man from Kentucky
still holds us in his claws on the throne.

14 April 2007

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A photograph of the main square of Providence
in almost rain, construction sites in view, autumn
two thousand and six, Stravinsky's little opera *The Fox*
on the phonograph, old vinyl, Ansermet, when
are we anyhow? Why should anything last
longer than a few minutes, why should we remember
the beginning when we're comfy in the ending?
Overtures are openings, who lingers in the doorway?
Mistletoeless, it breeds no kisses, it is infested
with absence, riddled with going in and out and gone.
What is this picture on the screen? What is the song
two basses are bellowing about or to a fox? Who made
whoever made the world make the world? These
are dark theosophies, pal, a flawed opal worn
round the throat of a beautiful woman, be careful
what stone you share your power with, what color
you invite into your house. A spotted sheep
for instance. Or old woman with round round
glasses spinning wool from a vanished sheep.

14 April 2007

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Where did the light
battalions land?

Unscrew the doorway[,]the gold
shadow falters through.

Preserve the ambiguity—
I am yours.

These pronouns have no referents,
only endless bold referring.

14 April 2007 (late)

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Little terrace around a tree. But you,
you are in love with the distances
itself.

15 April 2007 (dreamt)

NOW

Sheen of wet street.
Snow or sleet descending
pale. No as they call it
accumulation but shine.

The glossiest unfrozen yet.

15 IV 07

= = = = =

This maybe cathedral that I sat.
Snow that acts like rain,
a torrent slips across the road.
I sit now in the remembering stone.

On the brink there is everything.

15 IV 07

= = = = =

Strange manners of a skyey court—
to whom you must bend low
and how—
 to kiss the other till the other
knows, just knows.

Now on this morning the snow has turned to snow.

15 IV 07

= = = = =

Write ink on unglazed pottery,
let it sink in.

Miracle:
a church flows up the sky.

You can see something like that
and still go on living.

Salisbury spire.
Look up. Its stone against your cheek.

15 IV 07

= = = = =

Somewhere I lost count.
And that
was the accumulation.

Yeats felt that virtue
flowed
a family channel,

a private self-arisen
quality
was merely insolent.

Him I reject.
But still
sought all my life

my vanished grandfathers.
Action
at a distance.

Time magic.
A child
is finally just born.

15 April 2007

MERCILESS INTERIORS

But outside it is snowing
gently, grass frosted,
a branch or two outlined.

Paling. The chalk
of our instruction. Rapture
of every single thing,

just look at it.
There is no paradise
further or herer

than suchness,
a thing just what it is,
before you, seeming to be.

15 April 2007

WAITING FOR THE TIME

But what can time *do*?
What kind of work
does a deer do
in the woods or
crossing my lawn last night
making the motion-sensor light come on?

The answer is in the question.
The animals, all of us,
turn on the light.
The radiance
in which we hide
like enemy aircraft coming out of the sun.

15 April 2007

THE KNOWLEDGE

Sometimes you're more than willing to be absurd,
like a clocktower over a bank, never exactly
the right time, and why should you, nobody's asking
and if they did you'd look the other way pretending
you spied a friend calling you from across the street.

That would be me, I fancy, that's where I live,
between the ice-cream parlor and the shoemaker
though he hasn't made shoes in a hundred years
actually, but names have a way of lasting
long after their meaning changes or just disappears,

don't they, Barbara? I would be waving to you
in my usual listless (read: non-committal) way
always ready to be dissed or ignored, always
game for one more try, cross the street, dodge
the snarling busses, reach the trottoir where you stand

immaculate as April snow on a startled lilac.
Then it's all up to you. This is after all a love story,
of the sort we read when we were children
not quite getting the point of all that wanting
though we knew plenty about wanting, what we

were after was mostly things. But there they were
women and men wanting each other, how peculiar,
what could you do with another person
we thought. And now we almost know.

15 April 2007
Atu XIX, The Sun

= = = = =

What would this morning be like ago
twenty years? Had just been working
on computers started Leading Edge
Word Perfect Nota Bene and
there was no e-mail for me yet.
What would this morning be like
before now? With e-mail it is always
now. You read when you please now.
What if this moment were before itself
and I could watch myself getting ready
to make the same old glorious mistakes
that sound so good for a little while?
Rhetoric. Rthesis, the actor carries on
at length and on the stage. Always
the Greeks spoke to another, never
talked to themselves or audience—
there is always some one listening.
Declamation to the empty stage
is poetry instead. We have learned
to talk when no one listens.
Everything is a week late, twenty
years before. Or yet to come,
poised in a silence I hurry to defile.
Or highlight with such jive as I
today give you example. Now is never.

16 April 2007

METALLURGY

The quiet knows itself. Aluminum.
Rat bite of the smallest glove, a worry.
There is a form of landscape not yet known,
hidden under Erebus in snow. Or no.
Aluminum. Of which Napoleon III
a crown had made, light and bright
and symbolizing little – stud it though
with bloodstones and garnets, tears
for aquamarine. I love you, poisonous
aluminum, the way saucepan bottoms
write black stains on sad white sinks,
childhood and Ajax. And aluminum.
The colander of it steaming spaghetti
memory is poisonous, a sickness
cured by age. The last thing I will get
to understand, pretty girls sailing
away from me in a magnesium canoe.

16 April 2007

= = = = =

What is everything is finished,
and a tulip?

16 IV 07