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If there is no self, whose arthritis is this says the joke. If you watch baseball on tv you'll see a lot of ads for prostate medicines. If you watch the news on tv you'll see a lot of ads for indigestion medicine. If you watch game shows on tv you'll see a lot of ads for headache medicine. Maybe if you look away you'll see a place without diseases. Or maybe death will be waiting, dressed like Pablo Neruda, conducting the orchestra of the damned with a ballpoint pen. We are disposable.

11 March 2006

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I can't even begin to imagine. Maybe it looks like a word in a foreign language, yes, I think it does, like the sign in the window of the Polish butcher on Nassau Street, yes, that kind of word, it looks like znak over the pork chops neat as pistols on their white enamel tray, only a little blood and one small fly. What color was the word then? Then it was blue but some days it could be red. I want a red word. And a ball of nautical twine. And a friend. If I give you half of my cinnamon bun will you be my friend? It has raisins in it.

11 March 2006

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A buzzing in my ears.

It is my brain

calling out to me.

When I listen closely

to the buzz

it disappears.

Then I just hear.

11 March 2006

"YOUNG PEOPLE IN PARTICULAR WILL FIND IT"

--Ammiel Alcalay's threnody for Jess

And where they find it

there will be a secret hole in the earth

like your grandfather's coal mine long boarded over

and full of dead animals that have fallen therein

and when they find it

the various marble monuments in the District of Columbia

will begin to flame with a strange purplish fire

like an inside out phosphorescence

as if around glowing fish inside the sea were a sea

in which the sea we know was just some fish

swimming this way and that

dragging us with it

and when they find it they will break in via the cellar door

and pile up books and chemical equipment all round them

and stand on desks and utter meticulous manifestoes

this time respecting the moons of Saturn and the national debt

and the bronze statues will melt

and the books begin to speak

each one out loud and sweetly in its original language

which is not a language anybody knows.

11 March 2006

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Here on this island where I was born the music was always here before me. Caruso at Coney Island vying with John MacCormack. Dinah Washington used to sing down the block corner of Franklin, and if you go up Flatbush you come to Gounod's opera *Faust* done by the Alfredo Salmaggi opera company at BAM in 1946 I am in the audience and it is very cold on the way home. We had to stop every few blocks and scrape the ice off the windows. But *Faust* showed the way, let the devil in. And here we are. The devil is well known to be the god of music and the god of weddings – the burning pine torch is his own, and he hands it to the bride. From his oakwood cask he shyly decants and proffers in a horn cup a wedding draught of his famous brandy. Brandy = *branntwein* = burnt wine. It is a cup of fire he gives the bride and her man, whom we call by the Old English word *gume*, but grinding our teeth with envy say the word as groom. A cup of fire from which the water has been burnt away, and what is there, the famous amber potion, they drink, and from the canopy the white doves escape to the upper air without a single scream. And no one knows when we'll get home. A wedding is, I'm trying to console you with this fact, a wedding is like an opera; soon the soprano and her tenor are finished trifling with music, and rush out on a high note, much like the doves, to get away from the rest of us. Who would not want to escape from us, we who are stricken silent by music?

towards a Brooklyn Wedding

11 March 2006

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Where does this want, or not, come from
and who holds it when it's here?

How can the reactor not react?

The actor can learn to defer the act –
but how to forestall the react?

11 III 06

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Late in the alley
love in a big
sombbrero
up to no good

caressing a shadow
that some day soon
will fall beneath
the feet of a man

a woman would suffer
even more
from the stuff this
love pours in

the intense
impersonality
of a shade's caress
drunk on this

savage
fluid lust
only a shadow
knows how to hold.

11 March 2006

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Sometimes things finish seeing. Then binoculars wait on the window sill and no birds by. Look at the rope coiled on the dock, each thread some destiny. You laugh. but time persists. I seem to have tears in my eyes. It must be the music. I seem to feel better when I have your hand in my hand, just the tips of your fingers. Warm.

11 March 2006

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Let the color of a thing
remember itself.

(The congregation sits.)

Up there they never talked to me in their language
always used mine
until I almost thought it *was* mine
and not some tepid pond in which I fell
by being born down here
among you, little fishes.

(The congregation
groans. Some cry: your birth for a blessing!
Some say: Go back to heaven!)

But I was a word and I spoke
and I forget what I said
and here I am

o little loves
I need you to remind me
of the word I am to say.

(Now some men pound on harpstrings

other men put brass tubes in their mouths
and make a grand braying sound)

It is as if at midnight
an ass wanders through the street
braying loud

and no one knows
if he rejoices or laments –

o the grief of a beast is a weighty thing!

(The congregation moans. Some weep,
some do not.)

But the rejoicing of a beast
is a bleak mystery
hidden from us like the sun
self-hidden in the noon blaze.

(The congregation is either silent now
or speaks softly some word they have learned.)

12 March 2006

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After the fog lifted the rain
stopped the outdoors instead
was full of the smell
of a construction site:
burning rubber, voltage
misapplied, scorching
electrical discharge, and earth
disturbed.

The disturbed earth.

We do what happens to us.

. . . 13 March 2006

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Things have reached that strange
beginning spring rain color the green
already answering. Everything
under control. The Romanesque
will happen again. The definitions
will grow in shadow, will specify
always more neatly. You will know
what buttress means, or ogive,
or mannerist, or rococo.
Old men on television point to things.
Now. It is all set to begin.
The electricity was waiting in the amber
all these years you wear around your neck
a light switch in the socket of your throat.
Turn every mineral on, a mineral
is your friend today, almost your mother.
Certainly your live. Things
in a city of things. Things without fear of ridicule.

13 March 2006

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Sleep is afraid of something.
Of course if it thinks about it
or looks in the hard book
we all write all the time
the obvious answer is waking,
its enemy, its jittery other self,
its bright shadow.

But there's more

to fear than waking. Sleep
without fear of waking
and still there's an anxious moment
deep in sleep, a tremor of the heart,
why, what are you afraid of?
Sleep tells me when I ask:
I am afraid of never getting deep enough inside myself,
or never getting down past coal and amber
to find the real dream I am supposed to live,
sleep's own dream at the bottom of the world.

13 March 2006

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Turn me towards the thing you mean.
Stand in the window in good light
and show me. It is so hard for me
to credit the presence of anything,
explain it, assure me it won't be gone
the hour I look for it, like the blue
bird who hears my eyes thinking
about him and flies out of the tree
before I remember how to see.

13 March 2006

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The world
is a conspiracy to be gone.

13 III 06

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Not knowing
is something worth telling.

There are scars
left in the sky even

and the rain like an old
teacher keeps trying to remind,

awkward, moment,
a moment more.

They call it spring as if it were a thing
but it is someone who.

A busy invisible administration
in charge of the light.

13 March 2006

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So the other thing is strange, the whale's birthday, the shark in the elm tree, everything waiting. Deep mist in two successive nights but clear at morning. Why. Everything waiting. One of those days when. And the dream. The Irish hotel was tatty but ok except for the bathrooms in the suite; one was dirty and I had to use because in the other the toilet was draped with layer after layer of hippie cotton madras spreads, one by one they had to be peeled off and there was the bottom of all soaking in the toilet. Yuck. Everything waiting but you still need to piss once in a while. The boundaries of the ordinary are sometimes very far. Then we had to set out to explore these primitives and their shamans, not quite Indians and not quite Europeans, something wooly and pale on the borders of plausible. He said we shouldn't arm ourselves with tape recorders. We weren't that kind of ethnologist. I said our presence would be armor enough, meaning offensive. But our presence is all we have to listen with. All we have to remember with. Then it was time to leave the port and set out to the west.

14 March 2006

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On this full moon day
not only is the moon full
but the sun is full too.
The grass is listening.

14 March 2006

Monlam Chenmo

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Is there saying leaving.
Or the few
snowflakes what is that
who stands before
my throne and me
with a sapphire
in my hand?

 Your eyes.

I have an appointment
with your eyes.
We have to look
past the fear into
is there anything there
beyond the fear

hour after hour
until we see.

Then we will know.

The ecology of needing
you needing me.

Machine of us

we need what we need.

14 March 2006

[ON THE WORLD AS AN ANSWERING MACHINE]

Dear machine I love you
let me speak with the one I mean
but let me speak with everyone too
especially the elephant trudging through bamboo
especially the wolf on the hillside
especially the lake and the long tunnel
under the Vosges into the fertile land of Lorraine.

Dear machine you're all I have.
All that I have left of Her voice
is safe on you, weird-sounding,
distorted, true as the Bible though
and sounding just like Her just like you.

Dear machine I want you for breakfast
I want to rinse your message through my teeth
and feel the knobs of you in my mouth.
But we won't hurt each other
I'll bite you but not chew
suck but not swallow
and you will talk to me all day long
but never really say clearly and completely
the real sentence She left you to say.

Dear machine sometimes you stop
and cut me off after a word or two of mine,
it serves me right, you're teaching me
to say it fast, the whole thing I mean,
maybe I *could* say it in one simple word,
leave out all the hellos and I love yous and goodbyes
and just say that one blue word,
dear teacher of concision and poetry and lies.

15 March 2006