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a Croatian man a man from Croatia
on the Adriatic and he should know
told me the only way to cook an octopus
and keep it tender was to simmer with it
several corks from bottles of white wine
only white wine would do, he cooked
it all the time that way and it really works
I tried it myself and it does and I said
aren't you really from Croatan the lost
colony those white men vanished among
red people and all their secrets grew
smarter and smarter hiding in the trees
remembering octopuses and ocean,
remembering wine? he said I have no
idea what you're talking about now
I come from Croatia a town on a real
enough sea, you couldn't pronounce it
don't let it come to a rolling boil.

1 December 2006

DON'T HAND IN OCTOPUS PUZZLE

(a prompt from Zeke Virant)

and then the God stopped talking.
Then *puzzle until* he seemed to say
or Echo did, that flighty
everybody's girlfriend who
is always running away.

At least
her voice grows (as they say) fainter.
And by Doppler's law faint is far.

2.

The octopus or eight-footed line becomes a sailor's nightmare.
No part of your body he can't reach or make more aware of him
than even you'd like to be. Ignorance is sweet, especially

what the skin knows and doesn't tell the mind
or the soul that simpering white-hot energy
you never silence utterly. Things wait for you:

the dragon's on the telephone.

1 December 2006

(5) (*Bax suite*)

But I was that rock. The bird.
I sat on that rock and gulled.
I gauded out loud.

I jeweled.
Watch me, I can swell
my ocean like a breast,
a lover glad to see you lifts
wholehearted ribcage your way.

Rock. I was. A melody?
A melody is a memory,
a good tune is something you never heard before
and instantly recognize,
it was a part of you always before, waiting to be heard,
a melody ergo is a face
an abstract of deviant behavior,
the otherness of the other, soft
looping around your hips. Seaweed
or hands or Irish music.

She came
with such white hands.

No one
is born here anymore, a rock, a castle,
a door without entering, a bird without a sky,
a rock without falling, but a sea
with everything you need.

Tintagel it says
on the postcard,
hear me weep. Hear me waves,
landlobster, jump ship in mid air, prairie merchant
sell me a mile.

A melody again
my first love come back to me again
with a diamond in her nose and sheep on her mind,
o I have lost the leastest thing
and it was lovely,

foggy night on Minetta,
the curve of street, plaster dust of all her scraping,
flakes of gesso on her breasts.

Melody

is memory, memory in the very
act of happening,

the king's away to war,
his wife asleep in the dark, a thought
comes through the night and finds her,
fondles her imagination till she takes
the idea for the actual, conceives.

In less than nine months the child is born,
the one who will save the world,
bear-warrior, wild boar of Cornwall,
then lose it again.

And in some lake
the other side of Persia waits his time
to save it again, his cue comes soon,
to enter the music again,

have I told you
all there is to say?

I was rock in those days
or a long-legged bird like an oyster-catcher,
I swam low above the waves and saw it all,
I rested from my hunting, nested on her battlements
and heard her dreaming:
melody is the detailed memory of the future,

I heard and heard, her son
is no one's son, her son will save
and lose and come again, we know all that,
we learned it from every spurt of music,
his long Tibetan mustaches, his blue-steel sword,
his spaceship like a floating water flower,
his eyes amused at all his dying,
his full of sorrow for all of ours,

arrival,

in the strict sense every rock
is an arrival, you cannot come
prompter or closer than a rock,
a rock you sit on along the shore,
toes in wave ripple, a rock
you build a castle on
in which a woman sleeps till the best thought comes.

2 December 2006

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Or as if one were enough
some sort of different music *as if*
a man licked the nib of his pen
and coaxed the waters of Kastalia to flow
ebon-silvery from his spit in gibbous moonlight
now god's December stalks the earth—
eight o'clock, Orion on his elbow wakes.

2 December 2006

THEREMIN

The theremin. Its strings
invisible rehearse the air.

Music is permanently
getting ready. Preparing us
for silences to come.

Not silence.

There are as many silences as
roads, beasts, weathers,
broken toys, tears, tones.

As many silences as stones.

The terrapin
though gave its shell
to Loxias the Tuneful
teller of all future things,
to string with beastly sinews and make sing
of what he's thinking
and what you're feeling, and what's to come,
what he's thinking now is what's to come,
his now our then,

lord of the oracle.

They call him Apollo too,
the destroyer
because his music dies away
and the truths he sings fade into the empty mind
and the future he foretells
dies away with overtones and echoes and complaints
and the singer sings always *moriendo*,
music is always busy dying,

no accident

that operas end
with death all round, with one last kiss and then one more
long drawn out breath, an air, aria,

then Loxias lets his shell fall
and we hear the clatter of it
fresh again among the little rocks,
the pebbles of all our paltry silences
"from which also love one day may" speak.

3 December 2006

ANTIQUES

What is not wonderful is that these few valued scraps of earlier life survive more or less intact. What is wonderful, and very strange, is that there are so few of them. The wonder is that we are not a mile deep in all the things, the ten thousand ten thousand ten thousand things, that have been made and used and lost. Where did they go?

Where do things go? Aquinas, following his master Aristotle, assures us that matter can never be annihilated, can only be transformed. And that transformation can be into energy, as well as into other things. Did all the things that ever were, the things of Babylon, the things of China, the things of Serendip and Thule and Thebes, did they all turn into energy, and are we living on them now? Do I survive from day to day sustained by the lost toys of my childhood, somehow vanished by enchanter Time, or Time the reactor, and changed into the energetic forms of air and water, mineral and us? Are the things that used to be around us now somehow the food we eat?

How does that happen? Where do things go? My red cast iron bright Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey circus menagerie wagon, with gilt all over it and curling letters, and a real lion inside it big as my thumb now but then much bigger, also of cast iron, where is that scarlet chariot now, that cage on golden wheels? Where could it have rolled? How could the iron horses that pulled my wagon come to life and run away and die? Where could they all have gone?

Where are the lost things? They are still somewhere. Where? Or perhaps they were never here at all, and all the slaughterhouse of memory is frenzied only with the shadows of beasts.

But if *anything* ever was, then everything was. And if it was, it must still somehow be. We think we're so special because we can up and die, and rot away, and finally be gone bar a bone or two. Not so my iron horse, not so the wagon, not so the girders that held the Third Avenue el aloft, safe above the derelicts of the Bowery and the prosperous burghers of Yorkville. It all went somewhere. Where?

This sermon I delivered in dream last night in a loud, self-assured, showmanly voice, with ample gesture and stalking about among the diners, to an audience of Diane and Jerome Rothenberg, and a newly-hairy David Antin (brown, grey at the temples) and his companion not known to me, all met by chance in the back room of a New York restaurant (ethnic – Korean?) while my companion, a small nervous woman I scarcely knew hovered at the end of one of the tables uncertain of her welcome.

I've set down above faithfully as much as I can recall of my rant. It was stagey, yes, but I felt passionately the truth of what I was saying, and amazed that no one had

said it before, amazed that things could vanish from the world. And I felt myself burdened with a choice of certainties:

- a) all things are still here that ever were, lost, but findable, and one can spend life finding them, saying them into the light.*
- b) or they had been transformed into (i) other things, like girders into battleships, old crockery into landfill, or (ii) energy on which we live, like trees into peat, petroleum, coal.*
- c) most appealing to me: that much of the thingliness of the world we apprehend, and later remember or think we remember, is only virtual to begin with, part of the Miraculous Unending Neurological Display. It means I can't find my heavy, pretty, beloved circus wagon with its two white horses and its real enough lion because they never existed as such, so that:*
- d) if things ever really existed, we would be swamped by them, drowned in them even now, lost among their almost infinite multiplicity of object and identity and use. Perhaps that's why the Buddha began by teaching the selflessness of the object.*

3 December 2006

TIME CODE

You can't expect me to believe that fifty years have passed since I lived on President Street. Just because the sun has flashed around the earth half a hundred times, and Venus has flown by more times than that. I know the truth. I know what time feels like.

No more than eight or nine years have passed – a couple in Brooklyn, one in Boston, one in California, and another few here at home. In this valley inside a valley, which turns out to be after all *Der Zauberberg*, the magic mountain, where Time –which is only an apprehension to begin with—is rightly apprehended in its true *density*. Here time passes richly and densely, so much to look at and consider, every tree has a burden to confess, every man speaks the truth. So it takes maybe four or five outside years to handle one real cycle through the seasons up here, this secret mountain in the valley I live on top of way down here.

3 December 2006

(*lassú*, first movement of Bartók's Rhapsody N°.1)

Insistent. I know what you're saying,
Bill, I hear you, you've said it before
we're friends, we listen
we hear the same silences together,

tell me again, yes, it is the one I mean.
She stands swaying by the kitchen door
the serving girls hurry both ways past her
but her eyes are so still, Bill, so telling

and they don't look at me, what does she see
when we're seeing her? her eyes, her eyes
looking up at the shabby ceiling, all the cobwebs
shadows in the rafters, who is she

remembering while I'm trying to remember
her just as she is now? then she moves
not smoothly, slowly, towards me maybe
and you, her eyes not on the room before her

turn inward now, she's humming that same
little tune the one you sang when we came in
she's looking not at us, never at us though,
only far out there where she's coming from.

3 December 2006

STARS

The little ones of night—
who is your mother
the one with so big a womb
you were all born together?

3 XII 06

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I was dead and the green road

past the gone house to the new stead
the road was a track now still grass but could go

the car could the gone house was an outline sunk in the ground
already stone and grass were in it

the new house itself was old
they were reading the will: and just
as I expected they had dug up
some obscure relation I hardly knew and didn't like
to give my household to

instead of the intended the mind of me chose,
but what could I do I was dead
and the beautiful road was green

4 December 2006 (dreamt)

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Now there are those who don't exactly die

but move from being alive to being dead
without transition or without consciousness of
whatever the creaking hinge of that door is

It takes a while for such persons
to take stock of themselves in their dead condition
and when they do they start to move about
on all the ceremonious occasions
usual among the dead
we can sometimes hear the hum of them from here

And they do their job, endure the reifying
gestures of their wills, habits, whims,
they go through the whole Show
enduring learning being compelled but all the while
looking vaguely uneasily for some boundary

But we are unbound and there is no end to now.

4 December 2006
(dreamt)

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Emerging from something as a sparrow.
Ape. Fumble through the door. Snow.
Remember what the man said. Who?
She fed the birds, she went to work,
the sky stayed up a little while.

A world without a single bed.
Guess me. Flower. Wrong. Toupee
on an elm tree, love to tell you.
Shampoo. What did they use
to wash their beards in Babylon?

Feral holy men all around us
rank as weasels. Prayer. Grunt.
A way of shaping the air. And send it
back to God Who Gave It. The song says.
Henna. Sesame oil. Ashes from the fire,

lamb fat. This coal so bright I wear
on Saturn's finger on my hand
to keep all things in mind. My grandfather
owned acres in that lost kingdom
but him I never met except in dream.

4 December 2006

Bartók, Piano Quintet. 1st Movement: *andante*.

Quine. Tet. Plain of Jars. Logic
of war. Bar. Toke of green
amoral fume. Soldiers come home.

To dissolve all choice
in the choosing. Dissolve place
in getting there.

Dissolve peace
into its constituent folk tunes. The song
so sweet it made me kill.

Death
is the only answer to desire.

War is not a fire it is a kind of lye
or detergent dream that leaves the bones clean.
Birds help.

Today we saw an eagle
soaring quiet, then low into our hemlocks and

two hawks waited on the headland
hovering.

Leaves love in the way. Truck road to Ur.
This is the music Avram mistook for a Voice
and thought the voice was G-d.

Rumble
of thunder and no mouth to hold it.

Say it. Lightning
on the horizon lonely,
treeless calm.

Then thought
his own voice was speaking
and making sense, Take your household
whole,

god and goat, slut and slattern, old
on your back and young in your arms
and be gone.

I am talking to myself,
I go. Present tense, English aorist,
there I go, talking, and then I go,
there's no time to it,

long time I go
and go to sleep early
the voice said.

O we translate
this high sweet persuasion of the violin,

everything tells us everything. Soft soap,
we are conned and fall asleep
dreaming of far away trees, busy arteries,
hurtless forests of larch

clambering up mountain slopes
to where the clean
air shudders with snow, we catch
sight of it falling, the sky in pieces
coming modestly down to us and we go.
Here is where the battle comes,
here the tepid lies of statesmen
do what states best know how to do,
kill the young, kill the breeders,
kill the houses, kill the wombs.
Salt.

And into this desert Avram is still traveling,
when all the men are dead
he will come just in time
to preach another kind of dying.
And we all die too
because some lord's voice tells us to.

And then it asks me, this violin:
to write instead of listening?
To write is a way of listening.

4 December 2006

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Simple sides as a mode of saying
integer expectorated from unruly calculus
unhands me in the chapel – I miss
the thigh of it, the way it feels to sway
– service of carols, madrigals at nightfall –
we have no dawn where I come from
only the pale sky of too late out no sleep
in the choir stalls the surpliced choristers
have at Benjamin Britten. Life goes on
no matter what religion. The way a clock
keeps perfect time on a bad man's wrist.

4 December 2006