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19. K.459

Swim swimming.
Accuse the thing
of being

[*orchestra*]

being what I want
or not

it to be.

Swim. A leaf
as acanthus or
some spiny
other sunburnt
fate a leaf
in plaster
to mark your wall
a part of nature.

You are you
because swim.
Things swim.
Wind swims your backyard.

The child comes out to play.
It has played this game
before. It may be he is born
knowing how to play.
To move each bead in place
or swim the air. Right.
It may be weather
that teaches him though,
watching the clouds
yield to sun the sun
to clouds and both to night.
He watches all day long.
Then follows the sun
home, goes in, he is home,
all through winter evenings
he remembers the game.
The molecules of it.

[*piano enters*]

With a coal on the hearthstone
he tries to draw the game,
makes marks. Marks mean
he thinks. A clock
looks down from the mantle
in the shape of a cat, it
is no part of his game.
A statue of a saint beside it
but he never remembers
her name. Bare feet. The moon.

When his mother comes to look at the marks he's made on the stone he has to
distract her. This is not for her to see. Don't give anything away. Mother, why do
we wear clothes, he asks, Mother, why do we eat three times every day? Mother
would you like to sew a button on my coat, an ivory button maybe or a button made
of horn?

Bone. Horn. Baby,
where do ideas come from,
why are your fingers black
why does every child I have lie to me?
What do these marks mean?

Moth and mildew,
milk and money
mother mind,
horn and bone
your only child

mother baby
silver tooth
baby mother
untell truth

o mother I am going fast
faster than forest

o baby you are staying just as you are
it is the sunshine that is going
and I will never tell you how far

O mother mother I already know.

II.

Suppose rose.

Yellow.

Wind sin
color enough.

Touch till
never. Stone
among stone
radical why.

An initial carved on a coping
or gouged there, easy
letters to incise, I's,
all our names begin with I.

Pick a number at random.
Then apply it to ladybugs
and see them crawling up a white stone
then count the dark little spots
on their cinnabar or sandarac shells or wings.

Think. The mind thinking
is a kindly surgery,
the blood and lymph that flow
are poetry and prose.

There, that's a comparison complete,
expressed in the simple colors of the absolute.

Meet me at the roadhouse in 1943
how can you forgive me for the war?
I drive there through the fluttering leaves
in a '38 LaSalle. You wait in satin.
We lose our third dimension as we flirt,
shadows we eat, I light up a resemblance,
on shadows we get a little drunk
and linger in the flickering moonlight motel.

III.

So to become a cliché
is better than thinking one,
yes easier to climb out
of the black and white frames
back into the world of color
which wins us with tricks of its own.
Coleridge, *Biographia literaria* chapter 13.
That's what we need, an arrogant obvious,
a mode that means
invention absolute,
but we can say anything
only because it's all been said before

other islands other dictionaries
other woman with long hair in her eyes.

Distinctions. I can think
because I speak. Silent,
what thinks in me
is only colors,
colors and contours
touching each other,
changing shape, moving
away, never a word,
thinking without words
is only colors, leaning
on things or leaving things
shapeless potent in the smallest
sky that still surrounds the mind.
I hear you (I think it means)
only because I hear me first

Like an animal I am,
holding words in my teeth,
as I run towards you
then in my excitement roaring out
and letting them fall, bite,
fasten the idea of my mouth on the idea of your thigh.

26 December 2006

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All the poems I meant to write
were done by the time I came along.

But that was when I still wanted to write poems,
before I learned that poems could write themselves

through me, and make the beast
reveal itself in the words it only knows

You need to have a wanter in your house
a bottle of violet ink from Paris

it gets used up mysteriously at night
you wake to find the trees

fluttering with letters, with edicts, with psalms.
Ha, winter, you say. And a Russian

colonel walks around the sky.

26 December 2006

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But the color of that now
so miracle, of I have never seen.

26 XII 06

20. K.466

υδατ- root of water
water, know you
you make apple

there is nothing yet anywhere but an apple on the tree

a woman in silvery clothes waiting in a lounge Third Avenue

meals ago a glass
there is nothing yet but a glass
the glass is waiting

waiting is empty

things do our deeds for us if we rest

water does it

it is a little like morning a little like lime

your eyes close together
what makes it cohere
and still be free

why can't we who are mostly water
behave with that coherent liberty?

but is water free?

But outside Cooper Union
in the great triangular they call a square
twenty thousand waited
indifferent to the debaters'
practiced insincerities within,
palaver undending, just like war,
but the crowd waited, knowing only
they would be martyred by the outcome

all a crowd ever does is wait
the outcome is built into the stars

of how we are
the preacher shouted
in the cold, the only cure
for slavery is for all men to be slaves

white and black and in between
all slaves, and only their masters free
those strange thick men who smell of verbena
and whose skins are the color of money in moonlight

For we are only water
one woman thought
and always find our level
fill every cranny
touch everything and leave
everything we touch
soaked with ourselves

glistening comely clean
glass amber stone china
glistening clean clear
knives spoons fingernails
a summer's face come
smiling up on Coney sands
pretty comely amatory
loose lonely o my new
born child come
dripping with my
waters too and then

[*Beethoven's cadenza begins here*]

it dries. And then it dries.

II.

Can I hear you yet?
Dear so like dead or like
deaf, your small blue car
across what slapping highway
pelts do you even remember
that there is something to remember?

This morning I need to know something about dying
so I turn to you, I loved you when you were young
and never knew it, there was a line

around you and a still awareness
that wasn't aware of me, hardly even of you,
I loved the clean limbs of your ignorance
about yourself, you were the society

you were born, water in clear water
poured, and you were decent, pretty, smart.
So I turn to you, now that you've had
a dozen years to be social with the dead,
tell me, is that company like here,
must I be to that manner born
to do death decently?

Can I hear you
even hearing me? That's all we want,
Olson said it when he meant to agree,
"I hear you," that's all we want,
I hear you hearing me this morning
mildest December, the hills of your Brewster
still autumn green, the hawks more frequent,
vultures up here too, and eagles,
and still the conscientious crows patrol,

you have left me this whole mild
protestant word to take care of
and I'm not even sure I can hear you
hearing me this morning, can't ask you to speak,
you let me speak at last, to tell you
how the silent liberty of all your constraints
spoke long legs, fingers, your shy green eyes.

III.
Old sky scrapers
when nouveau
still was new.
They looked like
fountain pens
standing on end.
What did they write
in the sky, guns
aimed at God?

I think of little clerks
in starched white shirts
my father at his desk
in New York Life
with glinty spectacles
or trotting up and down
so many stairs for
exercise between
the sound of money and
what else can he hear?

How old a city is so fast.
A man lasts longer
than a sentence
or a stadium, a high
house, office tower.
Nothing lasts longer than me.
The transplanted
rhododendron still
lives outside the kitchen,
shivers in mild wind.
For instance.

The army invests the deserted city,
puzzled soldiers press buttons
elevator doors open and close.
They ride up and down all day,
hone their spears on marble stairs,
what was the purpose of all this
they wonder. And suspect at last
that those who built it
had no idea themselves.

27 December 2006

THE WRITING LIFE

Sometimes the words come first and then, thus, the meaning. The meaning grows. Other times a shape wants to be told, of a place and its persons, or a desire and the poles between which it runs, from not having to having, crackles with wanting, expires in satedness.

A word spoken, or a shape to be told. That is the start, that is all. Not often the shape of something that happened, because nothing ever really happens, does it? We pass through awarenesses, of pleasure or pain, this one or that one appearing, touching us, vanishing again. Then we wake and find we have made war, and our lives are in ruins, buses burned, public libraries heaps of rubble, churches on fire.

And from what we see, we sink down into feeling, feeling again, and a word comes to mind. Or a shape hovers to be said.

28 December 2006

21. K.467

Far quiet
to hear
the hum behind the head

“do you think it was there,
the forest, pond,
before you woke?”

“it was round,
the sun shone in,
things already
and knew what to do”

listen to them – it could never
be otherwise, a month
with no eight in it, a tree
reflected in the lagoon, the canoe
slices right through the reflection

“film that in turn, level
upon level, even further
from the real
deep into what you feel”

but the other doesn't answer
locked in contemplation
of the mysterious lagoon,

its whence. Its hither.
People just want to know.

“Some people.”
“And the others?”
“Speak another language,
one without nouns.
A number system
without eight.”
“Why eight?”
“Oh pick a number,

divide it be me..."

they're smiling at
reach other now
drift out of earshot
a shape on water.
Canoe.

Come home.
When you're washing dishes
and come close to the end
suds thick at the bottom of the emptying sink
you see strange writing in the foam
you trail your finger through it
to write more, you write your father's name.
It even lasts a few seconds
before it dissolves into everything
you ever thought before.

Dyslexia. Royal throne rooms.
Satin jackanapes prancing,
ladies in fancy waiting, coiffures
like Babylon, a woman
and a man either side
of their retarded son
refusing to admit anything
wrong with their fine young man.
Dancers. The music
of denial. A few are drunk.
After all that's what music's for,
majesty asleep, love climbing
up the espalier, the skin
on love's hands smell like pears
(a picture of you smelling it).

II.

Water when we leave it alone.
Pond at dawn. Midday lagoon.
Even frost on the green hill,
so simply the many things

and water always only one.

Water when we remember,
old man carrying a red brick,
old woman without a coat,
a cat walking nowhere special,
the secret fuel of everything we love

animates the world around us,
engine of the immediate hums,
the secret fuel of every decent action
washes the stone steps of your house,
Baltimore morning, rivers
through your dreams, little brook,

little wooden bridges, o water when it
loves you interferes with schemes
of edifice and ownership, only winter
knows how to tie water down
and God has taken all our winters away.

III.

The diamond cracks.
Planes of cleavage
each one a Midnight Mass

pray in your sleep
sip the golden cup

Crystals have catastrophe built in,
each particular to itself
the lines where fate comes in,
the lines of me.

Through long years of mastery
I grew a crystal somewhere deep.
Doctors called it a disease
but I knew better – this hard
knot was the me of me,

loud at times, with a merry
feeling reaching down my arms
as if I were dancing with somebody fine

and what my hands felt
ran back up my arms
and stored that information
in the augmenting crystal,

sunlight fed it and the dark
gave it milk,
everything I ever saw
seems to be reflected in it

facet by facet, playful stone,
fatal luminescence of the sayable—
because finally I called the crystal by my name.

28 December 2006

22. K.482

Dragon dragon still.
Smoke of Danube
caverns. Duna. Rode
once over the Iron Gates
as if I were a piece of air
safe from everything
but breath. But some
being breathing.
Breathing a word.

A man with a cobbler's awl
conducts an orchestra of mice.
And this is Germany again
langue I loved and land amazed.
Astonished land
turned to stone
and a log in Lauterbach
fresh cut, red inner bark
fragrant, steaming
in the morning dew.

Dragon has to be.
Smoke in Leipzig
a tall tree of poinsettias
in Wiesbaden,
at the baccarat
and no wheel for him,
our only heaven
the hands of other men.

Nos autem homines
and what else were we
to begin, every Catholic
knew a piece of prayer
back then, put them all
together and out it would come
the Lord's Latin
the whole prayer
no one says but everybody

The dragon said:
all that's just a piece of art.

Sweet air, called *aria* in opera,
called gasp in the hospital room
where my mother couldn't catch hers,
her breath kept trying to go out,
go forth and be gone, quiet quiet
her breath, the soft little gasps,
as if she knew not to fight too hard
to keep what by its nature is always leaving,

sweet air, and then no more breathing,
and the selfish air goes out to fill
all the rampant selves in sunlight still,

so many I have seen die
once is enough
the dragon said
to teach you what to do

and where you travel
following the breath
to where it goes.

And who is this dragon,
the power of anyone who breathes,
pounds the piano, speaks the oboe,
orders his men to ready their rifles,
aim, and Maximilian falls.

The watch unwinds then
and I can feel no more
and I too fall, the way a body falls.

II.
Acanthus leaf
or something like,

stiff and spiny
sculpturous

is that a word,
Eve, my artist,

sculptress, how's that,
for a sad old genome

cloning into the west?
Where love ism that

dramatic difference
you have taught men

to carve out of the wood of war,
biology of plants and men,

neurosis of glaciers and rivers,
Eve, how can we sit

so close together
only a million year

apart and still
see your clear eyes?
in the day of music
I hear no religion

beauty

hardly let myself hear
no business now to be me

I am a rough agate
tumbling in grit
to be polished
fine by friction
of attending

listen listen

all you have to do
I do all the
work the music says

agate I was
and flute I am
and nothing forgets me

One by one the lovers speak
until Eve chooses
then up the wooden hill
to Bedfordshire
where my great-great-grandfather
under the quilt reads Sophocles
and waits and waits

in a world that wants to make every boy a girl
and every son become his dad's Antigone

names, conditions, aspirations. Sophocles!

The arrant madness of knowing anything at all

like Kafka standing in the snow
midnight in a nameless town.

III.

Unwearied caravan of I am
trekking across the manyness of sand.
What an endlessness of me,
disgusting gazetteers, autistic atlases,
mildewed maps I follow to keep on.
dead general, no quartermaster to feed us
and still the infantry of me hobbles on,
the merchants we're escorting
lost their cargoes long ago,
the panniers of their camels are full
only of dust only of shadows,
cool dust sweet in this dry sand.

Someone is always humming, we follow
the tune by night, follow the color
by day and getting there becomes
a fabulous religion. No gods in these places.
At sunset we sing our dreary anthem
and rest an hour, trying to catch
between day and dark that one
interstitial gate a few of me feel
we were one day promised. But by whom?

And where could it lead
more commodious than this vastness,
could it be the gate of a walled city
in which Being found better employment
than just Going On? Sometimes
we listen so hard we think we hear
the squeak or groan of that gate spreading
open. Or it could be closing, who can tell?
Most likely just the rusty screws
tightening even further in the organs
of our perception, mind driven mad
by listening alone. Night march.
Trying to be nice to each other,
why shouldn't we be since we're all me.

Keep thinking
all night long,
the trek
unravels
an old scarf,

unpeels its onion
lets its apple
rot on the branch
the trek
tricks us
to resume,

the stately madness
of assuming a destination.
Name it. Make it up
as you along.

Nothing keeps you,
sing the thing again
and this time pay attention.

29 December 2006