

1-2005

janD2005

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Recommended Citation

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=====

All I want to do is *say*.

Say to paper, though
paper to

the fierce blue sky over St Petersburg
in a postcard of a brick cathedral
I can't stop looking at

I want to talk all these colors
tile and dome and Christ in glory.

6 January 2005

=====
But are they near?
Was there a reason
for all this poetry?
I had to say it

as the wind has to blow,
meaning nothing,
being wretchedly present
only to the moment

the little ripples in the half
frozen river at Tivoli
three deer trotting across
our lamplit road –

meaning nothing.
Barely being.
Just a sound you heard
but could never prove.

6 January 2005

=====

A rarey bird
come back to me
sun broken
all over the snow
like a punch line
in search of its joke,

a rarey word
I mean to slip
sly-like
between your lips
so you would say it
and say it to me

I want to hear
I want to see
I want the senses
to be themselves
permission
for all they describe

then I would fly.

7 January 2005

SINISTER LANDSCAPE

As we moved slowly north we saw littered all over the tundra scraps and broken parts and junked punchlines of old jokes, jokes we had heard often, or only once, and then forgotten.

How ridiculous they were, fragments and gasped phrases and homeless images, ridiculous there on snow and lichen and bare rock, silly as a mustache on the face of a smiling man.

I found the carcass of a ke-ke bird frozen in the snow, not a peep from it, and not far off was a cat in like condition, still smelling of gasoline. Now we were beginning to remember. A toaster, a four-slotter, lay on its side deep in a clear pool.

Some things were still alive – as we came into a rocky gully, an orange horse scampered out the other end. And on a little island in the only half-frozen river a tall penguin faced us, with a rosary looped over its wing.

7 January 2005

=====

Find something to give a book,
a book is something waiting.

All the poems without you in them
would be an atlas of a strange country

all alone at high noon in the Sahara
who knows what other dreams are there?

7 January 2005

N

N. Need. Noth = urgency, emergency,
in case of need,

and Iago says *e duopo la morte ... nulla*,

after that urgency there is nothing, n.
Or an endless number, *n*, of anything,

the undefined, unlimited, no finis, *aucune fin*,

no. A nail in need.

Norn: the woman who is fate.

You said: Never tempt fate, that's my motto.

And when I wanted to walk over that way,
into the thin ground-mist rising
among the bare trees, almost evening,
you said: Fate is waiting there for you,
Fate is a woman in a red velvet dress.

A few days later you wore a red velvet dress, a gown really,
something you could wear to the opera, to hear Iago sing that
bitter nihilistic creed.

Excitement of saying No.

Red velvet
from some mediaeval
quarter of my mind,

rue Saint-André des Arts, Moroccan cous-cous
hole in the wall, the average crêpe too sugary,
poverty never changes, is always
in fashion, always mediaeval,

are you my fate,
my Norn?

Certainly you are my need,
my urgency, emergency.

And without you (*ohne dich*)
emergency would mean catastrophe,

a fugue with no resolution, *Reigen*, never-ending
entries and da capos,

the opera catching fire
and the whole opera house burns down.

La Fenice. Where we walked
in Venice. Burnt
nest of the phoenix, rise again
the way they do.

Out of need.

Ancient seed
they said
of Night,

whose true name was need.

From K comes N, from fire a catastrophe,
a knife to cut through time

and who is there
the one who's always waiting?

N stands for any name, nomen, numen,
they all are waiting,

from the neednight
comes the dayname

wake me, wake me,
the power of being you.

7 January 2005

=====
Not being, or nearby
even, not being.
The calligraphy of dust
all over the plums,

you are a market
I come to idle in you
to be some part
of your transactions

as if I were meat
or a chain of chilis
I want to be a part
of what you do.

My religion
turns out to be war.
My cup is empty

if it's not perfectly full.

7 January 2005

=====
Ice walks slow,
old shoes walk best.
We make mistakes,
we have rivers
and cross them.
Then what do we do
on the other side?
All we own
is the journey
if that's not too
fancy a word
for one step after
another, hardly
noticing
how far we have come
from what is ours
into our own.

7 January 2005

CAMPHOR

Waiting for the camphor
to dissolve in the islands
and the fishermen finish
gathering coconut shells
left over from a Lutheran
demonstration, the love
of Christ goes everywhere,
we saw a sail skim the lagoon

with a hull so slim beneath it
it seemed more like a shadow
than a boat for you and me.
But there was someone in it
outlined now and then against
the ruddled sails, a person
coming for us, who else
would need a vessel among
these islands where everybody
else was at home but us?

And then he was here
at the rickety jetty
with his wicked little craft
and we were scared.
But there is no other way.

8 January 2005

=====
Is it the moon
(almost gone now)

is it the gay Palestinians
in the shadow of a shadow

or is it a gold ring
I found in the rain years ago

who knows what diseases
the sun has, what pains

we, even we, could maybe relieve
or what envelope will come

Monday morning to change the world?

8 January 2005

DREAM

The baroness lost at sea. She was pleasant, round-faced, her dark blonde hair streaked with green – just like her daughter, who looked so much like her. She perished in the mishap, the daughter survived..

The baroness had been a sort of Eighteenth Century bluestocking, but very much of our day. Her motto, which she (alive in this part of the dream) explained to me, was NIL BARRENESSE – nothing wasted, nothing infertile, playing on her name, as if in older English.

Her son seemed to be Chinese-American, and I spoke to him as if he were John Yau, but he did not look like John. He spoke like him though, and when I asked how his mother had fared, he asked me How did you know? (That is, about the boating accident.)

A good question, and I thought about it as I was waking from the dream. Then fell back asleep and the answer came, The people of the deeper dream had told me.

And that phrase stayed with me, drowsing and waking, until I finally woke at eight something. The people of the deeper dream, who teach us all the things that we, in dream, already seem to know.

8 / 9 January 2005

THE DAY THIRTEEN NO'J

A day I don't know.
No'j. Earthquake. *Caban* Earth.

The thought that comes
along.

A new idea shapes the earth
and thousands die.

What is a thought?
A map waiting to happen.

Every day, Atlantis.
The sullen coasts
go down,
a massif shoved into the sky.

Because the growing is the knowing.

What is a thought?
A rat, gnawing at your house.

How long can you think
before the house crumbles?

Live through all the phases
of action, live through
forgetting the description
of these actions.

Live through the quiet
spaces that forgetting leaves.

No 'j, Night comes.
And in all the quiet

a thought comes.
Think it
but don't think it's yours.

The sea is always in search
of a land to swamp or wear away
or claim for its own.

But you're not the sea.
You are water.

9 January 2005

=====
Water and sea
same stuff

different doing.
Water rests

sea is a mind
can use only water

for its hands.
Water is innocence

life. Put many
beautiful young men

together
and an army comes.

A group mind
sins the sweet

material itself.
Tsunami. Venus

rises from the waves
and kills us all.

9 January 2005

CLAY

In memory of Guy Davenport

In the mud
There is something
That we need.
He used to tell me

How the maid
Would take him
Out in the woods
And feed him blue dirt.

The earth.
A kind of clay

It settled his colic,
Eased the inner man.
She would know
When he needed it.

Will there always be
Someone near me
To feed me the mud
I need, the soft

Melodies of Bellini
The hard melodies

Of Verdi, the blue
Clay of language

The words I need
To hear you tell me
Call me up and answer
Long before I call.

9 January 2005

OPTIONS OF A DROWNING MAN

I was the wave
that gave you grief
I was the old book
that told your fate

all blurred in old words,
I was never clear
and always near, always
my skin against your skin

if 'against' can mean
I love you more than
meaning even, for you
I would never make sense.

9 January 2005

=====
Little by little
the color comes.
Try to remember me
as I was before,

before what, before
I forgot what I was doing
when you asked
“before what?”

I forget what I was,
only that I want you
to remember
whatever it is I was.

9 January 2005