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ODE TO THE DEAD REVOLUTION

Ecopilgrim, I busy breathing.
Then the Spartacists arrive
glamorous with failure,
black pants and red faces like priests
of something or other, all
revolutions are opera for a while.
By 1804 when he was born
we were ready for it, despair,
symphonic music, serious poetry.
Then Zuk a hundred years came later
but I never called him that, only Louis
to rime with who he really was.

We pasture in our breath,
our little barnyard of metabolism,
adieu Voltaire, Ferney is an airport now,
it's always raining in Geneva, all
revolutions fail in novel ways
like Tolstoy fondling a peasant's
new-wed wife. I thought about
all this when I drove across Ohio

and saw giraffes troling in green rain.

You can see anything if you look–

that was the year Castro struck out the side.

6 March 2005

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Can this say that?

Is a miracle just a mistake
from another catalogue
misprinted in our own?

System of the world.

Platonists run barefoot
through my muddy streets
calling for their Aristide.

The ideal will never come back,
the messiah is always a week away
or if he comes at all it will just be
the sound of breathing at the door.

6 March 2005

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Playing cards
can be exhausting.
The ace of rumps
couples with the mine of hearts.
Overcoats on flowers
learn Russian from a little
book surprise the waitress by
not flirting. Your eyes
have screensavers too
otherwise you'd have
to review us all in dream.
But we forget, dream
is a book in still another
language, eyes
keep their color safe.
That's all they have to do.

6 March 2005

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And after this another grove
and then another scientist in love
wrapping tinfoil round a star
kind old man neglecting his cigar.

6 March 2005

(This is the only rhyme that true affection licits.)

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Too many people to love just whom
and that one who half-fell through the door
while you listened to *La Gioconda* on the radio
and thought about a haircut you had
on Crescent Street when you were eleven
the barber's hard belly pressed against your arm
when he leaned in to do the fine stuff
and there she was as if all those years
between the scissors and the music
were just the silliness of dream and here
she is and what will you do about it now?
Now is not a country in your world.
Music takes the place of now for you
and all like you, artists, children, pale
theologians with lilac in your hair.

6 March 2005

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It's a social accident that anything makes sense.
You'd think the birch trees and black aquavit
would be enough for amateur astronomers
on the Baltic's briny shore but no. Poetry
is taught in schools, and children drilled
in counting syllables, seventeen seems popular,
like red bandanas and big photographs
of Chairman Mao swimming in the Yalu
was it while MacArthur fumed. Politics
gets old so fast, talk about tennis with no net,
not even balls, just a racket. Chirac
for example, whose diction is as clear
as DeGaulle's, maybe words flow backwards
into the brain of the articulator until
the wits become as sharp as language is,
whatever that might be, you measure it.
All these people huddled in cold doorways
smoking cigarettes, it's the Middle Ages
all over again, the fatal pleasures of the poor.

6 March 2005

THE CADENZA

think of what happens
happens when Heifetz
tumbles how
what into the the cadenza
at the end of the first
movement of the of the of the
Mendelssohn Violin Concerto
it is 1949 Donald Voorhees
he of the big glasses and big
white hair is conducting the Bell
the Bell Tel
Bell Telephone Hour radio
orchestra on tel
evision Hei
fetz seems to pause for a
for a
fraction of a second before his
effortless iron arm
sabers his specially specially
curved scimitar of a bow down
bow down on the str
ings
the metal of his music

as if to choose
which of all the possible
cadences he would let
slip so quick through the old
black and white video of the sound
down a slalom a sla
lom all everything is made of
made of choices choose.

6 March 2005

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Things we find out at night.
Commandos. A screen house
on the side of a hill
snow on its roof, empty as Feverel

old name for the month before now.
Empty emotion. What
word goes with what.
It is hard to parse the world

the seamless place
I so keep trying to unravel.
Crows. They do it for me
measuring the sky.

And the shadow lines
the trees let fall, these
lead me home. Every word
is a raid

on reality mounted by
Cro-Magnon desperadoes
green-eyed like me, like me
hungry for it all to stay still.

And this failure is our certainty.

7 March 2005

=====

broken marriage raised abroad
you can tell it from his talk

what else do we tell when we tell

7 III 05

IN THE NIGHT

In the night
the left shoe changes places with the right

When I go to slip them on next morning
my feet don't fit

Pilgrimage of choices
go to work

this accident repeated daily
is clue enough to the final dimension

the other side of the blank paper
where the incomprehensible reality is stored.

7 March 2005

INNOCENTLY WATCHING TV

I don't notice the face-lifts and implants
all I see is colors and pixels
all of them symbolizing something else
something close, right here with me
out here in the actual, a face
I can study, a face I can touch.
I don't realize they're all coming out of anesthesia,
all suffering from some healing surgery of light.

7 March 2005

OLEVM AVRI

Salt say
or vinegar
soak gold
my oil

soak oil in sunlight &

snow also
is a chemical

every chemical
is a decision

we are near it now
the carving in the heart of a peach

trace the valleys
sluices of the hard brain

we water hell.

8 March 2005

Dear Sam,

I never called you that, not even once in all our lives together. You didn't like the name and called yourself Jim, a name I never liked at all though I like Saint James of Compostela, that Western alternative to Jerusalem. Why couldn't you have called yourself Santiago, or Diego?

You didn't like Sam because you said it made you sound Jewish. But Mother often said we were Jewish, so what's the fuss. This isn't Germany. Roosevelt isn't Hitler. Neither is Truman – you looked just like him, people called you Hey Harry in the street to your Republican fury. Neither is Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Bush. Clinton. I don't even think the new Bush is, too soon to tell.

But you were Sam, named for your grandfather, who was named for his father, whose father's name was William, but William's father was Abraham and there we are, Jews again. Once a Jew, always a Jew.

So there we were standing on Belmont Avenue in front of the synagogue. I was scared. Scared is the same word as sacred, did you ever notice that? I was scared to death by the dark up there around the Ark, a dark that was not empty. A terrible presence was there. The holy, people said, but I could feel it in my blood, in my breath, in my sphincters even, that power or whatever it was up there behind the Torah locked away, the words locked away from the power that wrote them. Maybe the power would change them. Maybe the power changed me.

I ran outside and would never go back. We stood outside and the bats flittered through the trees and you talk to me in your always quiet, lucid voice. You call me Robert, and I have never accepted any other name. I call you father, and that was the end of names.

ton fils, R

8 March 2005
(class exercise)

=====

More all than chemie
more dust than do

still, one's father is a farrier
and one's a mercer
a fletcher, a licensed fool

Because our names are dandelion fluff
our seeds go everywhere and last and last
when the dimple yellow flower's done

Jester, be silent on the shores of that well-to-do lake

the little boats with such big sails.

8 March 2005

SACRIFICES

Everything is frontwards in the mirror
we live reversed

that's the real stuff in there
the bright kingdom of our suppositions
we call our senses

Lick the glass, masturbate
with white gloves, dream
the long dream of being a machine

it's all right, be a flower

pluck yourself and toss you to the sky.

8 March 2005

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The condemned man
strapped into his gurney for the lethal injection
gets to read his last words to the world

the nurse who'll kill him holds
his long-pondered handwritten text up to his face
he squints to see

and reads out loud but already can't hear what he says.

8 March 2005

FOUR PANELS FOR RONI HORN'S *STILL WATER*

1.

In Galway harbor saw a seal
played with us all afternoon
beside the jetty, on cinder mole
a little grass where lunch got eaten
we watched the creature slithering
through the pages of the water
this book the Irish heart's been reading
so many years there is no child
doesn't know maybe all too well
this quick shadow is his mother

2.

Her warm voice puts numbers on the river
and reads them the way we read
the sensuous impositions of the light
“beautiful pictures” we say when
water holds its breath and lets you talk
lets the eyes do all the drowning
lets such details as language that
interminable footnote to the world
sift to the bottom of your seeing
sly decomposition of the fact you think

3.

Water shadow mother word

my love's a shape all quick and wet

and all those tunes Joe Cooley teased

from his Galway squeezebox till

his own lungs wheezed out aieee

there's always something to be said

the Thames she runs through London town

but only aliens ever look at it

a strange hard river like no other

reflects no human faces only houses

as if we are just weekend ghosts

not worth any mirror's trouble

4.

No sea is glass no seal is certain
we finished lunch kept driving north
no sea is distant on an island no sea
is absent from the river, where would we
stop for tea, where would you decide
to drown if you had to, I tried once
and didn't like it, the water made a terrible
roaring in my ears as if all the living
and the dead were all at once
frantically telling me some information
they imagined I did not already know.

9 March 2005