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TREES IN SNOW

Enraptured servants of
arms waving over Poland
trees laced intentions
do I have to fill in the dots
what do I have but dots
to give you? candy of that name
half-dome licorice Brooklyn matinee.
Only points on a graph—
do you have a pencil, a straight-
edge – oh the pomps of math
teachers never saying ruler—
o geo that has such metry,
mastery, who is the mother
of the earth? Does anything
last? I know you didn't
ask for questions but here
the trees are, sudden isolates
in a white weaving
a basket to hold the sky,
the trouble with me is I have to tell
your something before
I let you alone, it is a curse,
yes, I know it's worse for you,
the listening, but there it is,

plain as the snow somehow —
that cheesy cheating word —
making everything different.

Thanksgiving, 24 November 2005

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Years from now
you'll have to pick out
the different voices
I talk to, talk in,
the different
voices that talk to me
and find beneath the lyric
the epic underfoot
that all the snow and roses
tries to hide.

24 November 2005

EPIC

And what is epic?

A war between friends
for the sake of fugitive
experience, a pale
entitlement, a touch.

They speak the same
language, they know
the names of everyone
they kill. One has a city
one has anger only—
the city always loses—
that is the real story
of the Iliad, the only
virtue is Civility,
all others come from it
and without it
none are possible
very long, and
our only art is city—
anger tears it away—
they murder the son
on his father's knees—
essence of cityless rage.

Virgil understood—
the Trojans, what's left

of them, try again.
Sail out and set up
a new home. Rome.
Which is still there.
The only struggles
is between city and anger.
Bedouin armies
trudging through the snow.

24 November 2005

PONTIUS PILATE

Why? His wife, his headache?
His lake in Switzerland,
in France. Surely
on the Swiss side, looking
across at the Alps, Point
de Nyon, Roc d'Enfer
not far. And way up the sky
the Needles of the South
and the great White
Mountain itself
he would never climb,
seldom see, always
think about, see only
on those strange pellucid
days when wind
scoured the Chablais
so across the sun-scarred lake
from his little trellised summerhouse
up the low Jura foothills he
saw and interrogated the mountain
as once in a hot city
he had asked a man
a question no man could answer
but this one did.

24 November 2005

CARAFE

The water bottle on her table
holds a little light
all night long, holds it
for her, to take at morning
mingling yesterday's
with the new day's light—
a kind of medicine
she drinks when she rises,
I hear the water move
as she tilts the bottle
and it clinks against the glass,
then she swallows.
It makes me strong too,
just hearing, knowing
she is here beside me
clear as water from
which we came.

24 November 2005

LISTENING TO THE GRAN DUETTO FROM *IL PICCOLO MARAT* OF PIETRO
MASCAGNI

1.

Could it be purity
that sounds this way
like a woman's voice
on an eighty year old
recording, a voice
singing to me in another
language, words
I don't understand,
is that purity, this
incomprehension,
this beautiful tone,
her voice interrupted
by a man's voice,
duet, but he sounds
years closer to me,
how we age, how years
make their weird
harmonics too,
but both of them,
tenor, soprano, carry
a purity, pure as time

pure as death, they both
are dead, long ago,
my mother and my father,
how hard they sing,
the notes they reach
I could never touch
high as a church tower
high as a cloud
and the cloud's above me,
we live in shadow,
live in the shadow
of all the voices ever,

2.

and a boat
with a prow
like a bird's beak
lifts us poor Egyptians
across the sky
we don't believe in,
we don't believe in
the place to which it carries us
but we land there anyhow,
the gods are there,

their sweet old cracked voices
caressing is with the pure high notes,
fading pianissimos then we sleep,
who knows if we'll ever wake
or if we do what making means,
what terrible responsibility
we take on by hearing such sound.

24 November 2005

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The radio schedule
from another planet
starring nothing
you could even hear
except this:
one station plays
all day long
your mother's voice
calling your name.

24 November 2005

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With the ancient permission of the ink

I interview the blank paper.

I think it tell me more than it knows,

certainly more than I know.

Is it the ink that knows so much,

this wet alphabet, blood of the moon?

24 November 2005

LIFE TUBE

The purity of it talks again
like a piece of marble.
Seems one thing but colors many
in it, the material world
is always a compromise.
Slow down and get there.
Purity. A page void of blunder.
Have to make my own mistakes
says the tee-shirt from China
where else are all of us from
come back to see the kaolin weather
milk sky in the broken teeth of earth—
there is a transparent tube there
14 stories high – a sick man enters
at the bottom, floats up slow for an hour
though all the zones of light and fussing
machinery and comes out hale at top,
smiling. Rebalanced. This is called:
resetting to body to default.
Sometimes even teeth begin to grow.
But usually it's enough to fill
the body with a sense of gold.
After the first treatment you can ride
(rise) in the life-tube often as you like
for free – but now it takes only

a minute or two like a midtown elevator
coffee in your hand. Once a would-be suicide
tried to climb in at the top – he sank
slowly to the mezzanine, his sickness
and self-distress dissolving. Emerged
healthy but confused, having lost
along the way all sense of why he was there
or what was wrong with the world.
The end of such stories is always
back to work. Apostleship of obedience.

25 November 2005

=====

There once was a man who mortgaged his cow.

There are no women in this story,
safe enough for a girl to read it in a mirror
and turn all the boys back into cormorants
greedy birds with wide wet wings.

Girl sitting on a marble bench. She hears the wind
and lets it tell the story: The cow wandered off
in the night, the man had nothing, the moneylender
had nothing, nothing happened. Someone
found the cow and bred her. Later the cow
gave milk. Now you know. Now it's time
for you to break the mirror. Let the lovers out.
The only hope is war but you have lost your stick.

25 November 2005

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The place is not a place
the place is worry,
or family, the second
oldest story.

A jagged rock
we brought home here
from the island to
pierce the quiet air.

25 November 2005, Boston

PRACTICING REALITY

for a change.

The man alone in the house

thinks there is no one there.

But the sunrise flushes extra red

the brick of the church up the hill

for instance. And more to the point

the various classes of Beings

who are in the house with him

scurry this way and that to be

out of his way, out of his sight,

to help him preserve the pungent

liberating joyous illusion

that he is the only one there,

like a Catholic in heaven.

That he can be alive and still alone,

that he can make up his mind

or just attend to it quietly,

whatever comes up to think about

he can think about just that

or not even, he can let it slip away

where the mice and wolves and ghosts

can play with it in the dining room

while he stands by the Christmas cactus

in the living room thinking how quiet I am.

26 November 2005, Boston

BOSTON DAWN

red sky at
sailor take warning
light enough for birds
but I see no birds

the parliament of crows that usually meets
across the street
one day I counted forty in the branches
is not in session

the sky is pale lilac – what does that mean,
soothsayer?

And all the bare maple trees
do their calligraphies,
a Koran of intersecting twigs and branches.
But the birds must be a different religion.

26 November 2005

IMBRICATED

as tiles overlap
to keep the rain
out, the way
scales set so
a fish never fears
water, we
are imbricated too
but what is the element
we need all round us
we must never let in?

26 November 2005, Annandale

=====

Go back to the waterfall
if you can, you *piece of water*
fluent fueling the whole night
since a spatter of snow
fell in you, bring me that
snow again, in all its particularity,
rays, crystals, featherings—
then men shall die and
come to life again.

26 November 2005

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Arms have a star.

Axes have crystal.

Words have a woman.

I tried to be silent

but the rose withered.

26 XI 05

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as if the answer belonged to the question

but who knew?

the organization held the copy

--alligator found in local swamp—

but no one told the mother

26 November 2005, Boston

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Confusing the smell of oneself
with the smell of another
as under the blankets wake
for a moment and not know,

not know anything, not just
who you are, this animal
that keeps saying I, who
the smell is and who is smelling it.

27 November 2005