

3-2004

## marG2004

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**READINGS IN THE *ALCESTIS***

Mouse touch

sound of leaf

insolent as if

samurai a leaf

cold as no wind

walk out in

a crystal

a paint to breathe

sunlight out

*a little house*

*with no one home*

all the children

have grown out

and come to me

brides and bridegrooms

myriad marriages

the simple light

something walked

around the breath

something wooden

something wish

the old plastic

salad spoon

so many witnesses

in actless love

watching one tree  
do nothing  
the River Sermon  
mothers!  
where is your ice  
and old John Bridge  
investigates Euripides  
a daughter patient  
and a husband glad  
no one in this place  
without a mother comes  
that is Tella herself  
her house  
nobody knows or  
name her water  
soft skin of her feet  
the local news  
short breath  
the afterlife  
respect another's  
imagination  
but do the work yourself.

22 March 2004

## ELEMENTARBUCH

a borrowed language is always  
a little blue by bird wing  
flew around in it nervous  
the way they do constantly  
distracted by food and from  
food by fear into flying  
because the new words don't fit  
your careworn patterns the old  
mother in your mouth to tell  
But are you really trying  
to say anything, of course not  
we all know the truth  
already, there is nothing to report  
you love me and I love you  
and it's perfectly natural  
hence quiet as a fox asleep  
but all this other stuff  
keeps going on, startling dreams  
of the dictionary keeping  
people awake all night  
talking to the window pane  
praying for it to fill just  
one more time with light.

22 March 2004

## CONSOLATION

I can learn Old Assyrian  
because there are no Assyrians  
I'd have to talk to.  
Silent ancient languages  
half breath half rock.

22 March 2004

## FORTRESS & CANNIBAL

what comes next  
midwinter salmon  
solomoj the wise  
now the wisest  
creature on this  
world of ours is  
strangely the eldest  
too, the salmon  
in the pool beneath  
the Hazel Tree  
but if he's so wise  
why has he lived so long?  
because life is sweet  
and pink and meat  
and nothing follows it  
but more or less  
and there is nowhere  
to go but here  
so why not stay?

But the saddest  
creature on this world  
is a voice no one  
can ever own

an echo kind of thing  
that speaks at dusk  
I ate my life and then  
my life was gone

Now Solomon  
had many wives  
but not that one,  
and slaves who dressed  
as women, but not this one,  
and concubines like  
leaves on maple trees  
and every one of them  
knew how to play  
the sorrow card  
but not one of them  
had a voice like that

where can I go  
to keep from hearing it?

22 March 2004

## MORNING SICKNESS

something runs through beneath  
moon and cluttered beach  
noise birds

we spoil  
the world but the world's still there

this thing they're trying to turn into Mars

Hollow in the head  
no breath

valetudinarian poesy  
the kind that sells  
because it has everybody's  
symptoms on display

but they will not say  
the thing that only saying says

Divide me into simple words  
the rest is only true

Something wrong in me  
uneasy sunlight



the lawn has a headache  
morning shadows keep some of their mystery  
water the house plants  
be quiet and wait

in the afternoon  
shadows have no history in them

silence  
my last conversation

What are all the books about?

23 March 2004

## B-13

: bus over Cemetery Ridge into Ridgewood

through the stone urns and stone veils  
they said was the Jewish cemetery  
Catholics had angels Jews had urns

through yew hedges and poplars  
to come home three hours later  
with a Charles Williams novel  
half read already and some cheese  
from Finland wrapped in tinfoil

o god those were the days the graves  
shadowy in the last leperlight of  
island summer, who knows  
who is still alive in there, always  
there was movement, grey  
among the graves, I was the kind  
who hung out with the dead,

by this stubby miracle of a bus  
strange places it knew how to climb  
and come down again and pass  
my own front door on its way  
to the coast not far away, so obvious

a vehicle it's taken me all my life  
to understand how magical its scant  
hour journey was, from sea to hill,  
wandering through the network  
that under-rides every stubborn city  
and brought me home every day,  
lunar Brooklyn, safe among the Russian Jews.

23 March 2004

=====

*after Ali Feser*

**“And therefore a back is closest to the hard inside”**

Because adversity always flows forward  
it meets you as you move ahead  
hard times in a hard town  
and Christ is just a sketchy silhouette  
in the open church doors, sunset,  
Mexican food, the waitress  
never remembers you.

Because the back is soft.  
Look at her back soft in her peasant blouse  
carrying steaming chimichangas  
to other people's tables or  
I should think about my father's back  
the last time I saw him, getting on the gurney  
going into surgery, his back all soft and pale,  
like skin hardly born and just about to die.

The back is soft – we touch each other  
on the back to be friendly, a pat on the back  
we say, a caress, a lingering contact  
with the soft eternal part of you,

the inexperienced, unshaped by all the  
adversity to come. The you that is young.

Yet you hunger for that hard place  
in front of you, you are always running  
away from your back, did you know that?  
Running from your innocence into the hard place,  
the hard animal you become inside  
from all the lousy little towns you have to see,  
from all the people who call your name  
or never answer the phone, from all the houses  
with lights on in them but nobody home,  
from the tv news, the heartbreak living room,  
the burnt down church, your pockets  
full of money and the bars all closed.

23 March 2004

## ARCHITECTURALS

On the afterimage of the *peristyle*:

to be in someone's mouth  
behind the old teeth

a serene dowager  
who knows too many things

\*

Or *nave* meant ship  
upturned and under it  
we huddled from the hail  
while praying to the god of sky

\*

*Apse* is anybody's guess  
round and at the rear  
like a delirious secret  
publicly flaunted  
a miracle of sensuality

behind the altar's  
rigorous abstract

\*

*Maze* meant to go  
down in circle to  
the center and come back

from pilgrimage  
anything else  
is just walking around

\*

Like water whirling down the drain  
the light comes in

to such dim trajectories  
a *church* is a door

a dark hole carved in the light

\*

Stairs are made of steps  
but have a phallic  
upthrust of their own

Steps add, *staircase* multiplies

Because they are built of numbers  
they get somewhere and take us with

\*

Dialects of stone  
limestone  
cathedral  
granite bank  
marble monument –

go home to your chemistry set  
your little Bunsen burner  
your jars of goo

I can change any substance  
into any other  
or even into none

by pure forgetting.

24 March 2004



## **Her feast the hearing**

she grows from the word  
as it begins to speak  
inside her

the fig  
she will become  
to give birth  
to that tiger

all the natural world  
confused into clarity

a son, a new born  
three-quarters of a year away  
the strange fraction  
of our most intimate  
relation

how short of breath  
I am today, Miriam,  
greeting you, me too,  
every person eventually  
has to act  
as somebody else's angel

who gets to say the word  
you took as a question  
but that I meant as answer

when all I said that time  
is He is with you

and you answered your  
answer to my answer,

how short my breath today  
to say or ask  
three-quarters of my breath

what is the rest of it  
not saying, what other word  
yet to come  
is busying all our breath  
for the next annunciation?

25 March 2004

## CATERWAULING PARALLELOPIPED

it said, leaving him to wonder  
who spoke and why,  
a piece of paper, a box  
at no opera, the best seats,  
some crying in the night  
some alleywork, lives  
do not converge,  
there is no infinity  
the world has too many corners  
we come to  
and turn, must turn  
at some angle to our original  
intention, and always  
remembering to ask  
Who are we? What is our motivation  
in this scene? What is God  
trying to express by setting me  
in this situation?  
and by the time all the questions  
are aligned, the situation  
changes, the new path  
peters out, some dogs are howling  
deep inside or just beyond the woods.  
In the night I knew now I had lost her  
but I had not lost my way.

25 March 2004

=====  
Somebody else's voice  
needing hearing  
or stand alone  
hoping the animal  
quick arriving  
sandblast the new brick  
so fashion old  
give it an answer  
long before a question comes  
so they can ripen each other

every day is a test  
for which no one is prepared

even the final blow  
comes as a surprise,  
you daffodil.

Probe. Medical fingers  
of distracted lovers  
pry into the last hiding places,

no refuge, it is spring  
when such things are,  
and midnight deer leave

hoofprints in our gravel,  
you never say anything  
except to someone  
I talk to myself  
and let them listen,  
plant bulbs now  
something left to do  
always, ranunculus,  
narcissus,  
who is your hand?

25 March 2004