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NECTARS

Wind stirs in water. The calendar
calls the day Nectar.

But *bdud.rtsi* is the juice the devas drink
or yield or are,

in Greek old nectar was the milk the gods
squeeze from the deaths of living things

yes yes we know all this
you have told us this before

gods drink the deaths of men

a god is a great eater
we die so they may live

no no that is just the Indo-European thing
that Aryan misery,

wind in water is *alive*
we should never call it nectar,
no Aryan curse, no mortal gaunts,

our gods give *x* as bees give honey,

solve for that *x*, that juice so holy
it enters sometimes of its own virtue
in gold light gleaming down the apses of your skulls
and dreaming down your nerves to rise again,
Easter in the spine.

Yogi laughter, you heart that
quiet chuckle in a light-filled heart,
don't call it nectar,
call it dæmon honey and it's good for you,

milk pouring from these luminous deities
you squeeze so gently
in the meditating, nothing-doing mind,
squeeze and let loose,
a practice that in barns is called milking
and you do it to them,
the beautiful bright ones
touchlessly exuberantly pouring in you,
filling you with what wind tells water,
wake, be everywhere.

1 April 2004

Note: nectar seems to come from a stem **nekt-*, having to do with death, dying, killing. The food of the Gods was ambrosia, that is to say: *a-mbrot-ia*, immortality itself, while their drink was *nektar*, evidently the energy released by the dying animals sacrificed to the gods, and perhaps by all deaths of every kind. *bDud* is the Tibetan for deva, which can be god, dæmon, or even demon. *rTsi* is juice –thus the word for honey is formed from 'insect' plus 'juice.'

NOSTOS

1.

April and cold rain. To be home
in a house I will one day remember
with the same adoration I felt
for the first – because a man's first
house is the order of things ever after.
And now this house has almost
become what I am.

2.

Yesterday Brooklyn.

Today I feel like an archeologist
come back filthy from the caverns.
Caves that are my traces
beneath the landscape of the evident,
those old house, old streets.

1 April 2004

Bronze marker to set on the little Buddha knoll

Shale, broken shale, new grass in mud
not too giving this land seems
but very rich in dreams
and counsel and the long disease of love.

1 April 2004

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And suddenly I remember where the lilacs were!
just this side of the pussy willows
as I imagine myself telling the current occupant of
my old house and how the garden was
that's all concrete now, a mere enclosure,
and me looking out with my back against the ivyless wall.

1 April 2004

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Language is always reactionary, responds to other people's words, to the presence of other people whether or not they're speaking. Language responds to the potential of the other party's language, hearing or speaking. Language reacts to hearing. Arises, it seems, only from hearing. Who would ever have spoken unless first spoken to? (Who would think to write a book if no books existed?) (Who would answer a letter no one sent?) To the Hebrew phantom who first used speech, the Jews assigned the character of God, their God, the one, the one who had spoken to them. As if the Covenant were not so much the terms it stipulated as the very fact of a word having been spoken to them at all, the very fact that they heard the word. *That* was, is, the Covenant, the alliance of speaker and listener, of the word and the heard.

I suppose before the Torah we know lay a slightly older version that began with only one Hebrew letter changed for another, so that it started something like *Bereshith davar* ... In the beginning God spoke heaven and earth. (Then the creationists got hold of the scroll, lost or hid the mystical power of the spermiatic word, and foregrounded the mechanics of demiurgy, making God a maker, not a speaker, silencing His breath. Hundreds of years later the Scots got even, and redressed the error: for them, *maker* meant 'poet.')

Traditions persist in reminding us that things were called into being by another – or by one another: but certainly called.

Caught as we are in the reaction patterns of language, we identify purity or truth or liberation with some primal word (like the Fundamentalists of all the Palestines) or with ultimate silence, the 'sleep of names' (like the Buddhists). The

latter surely have a reasonable point: before the naming began, there was silence. But what else was there? What did we lose by all we gained?

But so many poets (not to speak of mystics, toppers, composers) are always hankering for the primal word, the lost word, the pure word, clean with beginning. What could that be but a word *come from elsewhere*? And what could elsewhere be, what place or condition is it that has such authority in itself that it can, for the first time, open some mouth and speak? Speak for the first time. Or that has such a nature (perhaps this is truer to frequent poet surmise) that its very nature is speaking. A word that has always been speaking.

And we began to be us only in the hearing of it. Word without a speaker, language as pure response? That, as Primo Levi's ultimate carbon atom lies in the period that closes his book, the primal word turns out to be, always and everywhere, this word you are reading now, this very word, this.

2 April 2004

THE DAY IS ARROW

The day is *arrow*. The day is *bird*.

A squirrel's on the ground, a finch
flies through the air.

Aren't they tired of not being me?

How can they have any fun out there
without my confusions?

It doesn't mean anything to be what we are,
I can hear them thinking that, but it is
a pleasure of its own, luminous
like inside seeds, quick and honest
like an arrow flying.

And who can catch an arrow?

Who can stuff light back into the dark?
Nature, it is time to fill your pens with ink –
write me a story with finches in it
gold ones out my window, nervous as I am,
let them pull the rain light
this way and that
until they rip the plausible fabric of daylight,
until the secrets start telling themselves
desperate for the ultimate striptease.

2 April 2004

COURT-METRAGE

it keeps saying this morning, short film,
make it, or short measure
or keep it brief, or measure
the manners of the court
as once I merry man pursued
the giddy somber ladies of the dream

in Irish time and I was other
and no one rent their skirts like me
and no one poured such milk.

3 April 2004

THE TROUBLE

The trouble with us
we had no beginning
no little hill we climbed
in each other
where we could see for a moment
who and where we are
and then fell down
and had not much to show for it
except some lovely bruises
but ever after we could have still remembered
what it was like up on the hill

The trouble with us
was all clock and no tunnel
kids need tunnels
to find each other
escaping from all the claims
bothers brothers husbands gods
kids need to burrow
in each other
until they're so far beneath the earth
they make their own rules
their blue republics
kids need to dig

The trouble with us
always seems to be somebody else
but is always us
too many voices too many faces
they complicate our little play
so many sub-plots so many
demanding voices
in each other
that make our deep mysterious connection
affection just a footnote
in all the old dull texts
so we face each other from opposite
sides of the stage
we make faces at each other
we make signs

The trouble with us
is nobody holds us together
we are feathers somehow
in this listless wind
that breathes us
everywhere else in the world except
in each other
in that indoor Caribbean
that rainforest in the bedroom
body we need

The trouble with us
we tolerate too well
all the separations
in each other
some patience sings us
an old dull song
we keep hoping goes somewhere
and will take us with it
but we have given one another
the strange permission
to be other
and cars keep driving away.

3 April 2004

Let things that are natural

know about the endings.
Civilizations are lines of poetry
that come to the end, flex
or rhyme or breathless
suspension, then the next
line comes, always another,
the epic of what happens,
how many lines in that poem,
where does the line
actually end, the Weimar
line, the Mao Tse-tung,
the eras one by one fold
together in the mind, o drowsy
are the readers that we are,
it is natural to be out of breath
the end of things snug in going on.

3 April 2004

CIVITAS

Heart habit

one upon another

streets and miracles

3 II 04

EVANDER

Let the squirrels do it
they do everything anyhow
put myself beyond the reach
of ordinary evidence
go out for a spin
let the bloodsucking deans
apoplect in their chanceries
let the roof slates
glisten in the Fourth Month sun!
Evander was the king of every
forest land before
the Trojans came the Jews the Irish
Yankees buccaneers,
Evander was the holy woodland king
his name means Good Man
hero heart well disposed
towards gawking interlopers, us.
How we have snapped his calumet!

3 April 2004

I AM WHERE NO ONE CAN SEE ME

But I am where no one
can be me, said the bird,
o sky you day-glo punctuation
make so many statements pause

the story breaks in half
our long recitals shiver
in the unending wind
the sky comes down

we say he went to heaven
or heaven happened to him
right here, like Fourier
in Africa, blood over white

sometimes the comedy
comes first, Marx's
patterned lute that sang
the looms of Lombardy

all work and no stained glass
the gods exist to take
this pain away, gold filigreed
their skins of lapis blue

Marx's lute in Mao's fingers
no one understands
power is the choosing not to tell
or not to kill

I am in the sky, it said,
winged, of either sex
as your body may have need
my six wings all hovering

they cover us both
the wrap, finale, apocalypse
of all our skin
unwrapping mystery

to wrap this ordinary thing
your flesh, all my arms
around your whispers,
brother, brother.

3 April 2004

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The outdoor months begin
air holds me I count against
the way I'd garment you
if I could, every inch of skin
a conversation or a triumph

I am why they came
from Troy to Rome to Britain
then came here, Northside,
East River oil green tide

I rise and go I speak
their language like dying
so that all my journeys strangely
look like staying,

nothing changes, I don't need
to keep telling time's
easy numbers, let
the years be alphabet instead,

qof for sleep or el for letting go,
a year is an uneasy mind
since unknown to us
the sun runs sometimes fast

and sometimes very slow—
and always spring shadows
look the same, but how long
it takes to get to spring.

3 April 2004