

7-2004

**juID2004**

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## **Coming close again and all the mermaids**

meaning on the other side of going in,  
snapdragon. Orbital highways  
the first one Belt. Exit Pennsylvania Avenue.  
Cal Abrams slugging flies. The elegant  
occasional, fungo. Or 128. “exacerbates  
insect damage” said the carpenter  
about the rain. What call do we have waiting?  
How do houses get into this condition,  
what does time want? We draw close  
to a point on the curve predicted  
by catastrophe theory, athletes.  
It’s all over in the first inning  
or Averroes in Paris – interfered  
with Natural Temporal Inurement  
using Logical Indirection Process.  
Did magic, spoke, woke the dead,  
the dead spoke, I asked, they answered,  
phantoms are the shadows of our questions.  
Where is the gold? Where the gold is.

Does the Mystery Line run from Saint  
Sulpice to someplace where the grail  
is hidden? The grail is hidden.

Run there. Kiss the rim. My shadow  
tastes like me. No one with a name  
is altogether dead. Hence Averroes.,  
a posse of cardinals swaggering  
crimsonly through Notre-Dame,  
little fruit fly fell in my coffee,  
lift-flicked him out, he flew,  
anything's enough to go on,  
save my people. Let the black rose  
that grows from the golden sand  
of the Qur'an open its fragrance  
in suburban living rooms, the poet  
has given you a text to strive with,  
a poem that always threatens to  
turn into law. Sometimes be literal.  
Sometimes take off the words  
and dance naked in the sand itself,  
let it stick in the folds of your body,

invigorate, impregnate, elucidate.

Privilege the smell of things,

revere porters, alleyways, culverts

by roadside, revere clouds

more than clarity, eat less red meat,

study the clouds using reverence

as your alphabet, write God's ads

on your forearm and study it

day and night, in exile, always,

then send him a letter from nowhere.

14 July 2004

## THE INVENTION OF THE ILIAD

The Germans did it. Before,  
we had the sweet byways of Odysseus,  
honeyed mysteries, all his lies.

The Germans hated that, they liked  
only the truth, any truth,  
the truer the better, and what could  
be truer than to kill?

A corpse always seems the one  
incontrovertible evidence.

But of what? Seriousness? *Rage*,  
as the book says, a man's rage  
and how it prospered. Boys  
pretending to be men – no wonder  
it became a privileged classic,  
schoolmasters make up the lists,  
they all are men ill-cured  
of being boys. This long poem  
about war that Shakespeare and Chaucer  
never read gets made by Goettingen  
and Harvard soon the core text

of what we are supposed to mean.

Pile the bodies high beside Scamander,  
burn them with oil and wine and salt,  
let the bale-fires leap, the flames repeat  
accurately in the water, let the water  
carry the word of fire out to sea  
till every drop of ocean gets the story,  
it is fitting and beautiful to burn and kill.  
Alexander, warden of men, had  
this book carried before him into battle  
because of how well it showed the way.

14 July 2004

By chance I dated this 14 July 3004 – and I might just as well have been put off writing it a thousand years, for all the hearing it will get in these days.. The classics are imposed, the crown of thorns on our striving, and not even a pacifist seems to see how sinister the interest is that the Iliad takes in the business of war. Give us back the Odyssey, and take this somber funeral guide away.

**<late:> =====**

All the changes wait along the canal  
but my gondola is slow.  
There still are crucifixes  
pinned to the black velvet  
and a mezuzah beside my mother's door.  
Some days I think as slow as marble.  
Some days I feel like a grain of salt  
dissolving in your wet lips.

14 July 2004

## **MEN**

Men are no longer falling out of the sky.

Something has happened to the system.

The system hurt its knuckle in the rain.

Now it is clear and even blue

but men are not falling out of the sky.

Instead, they are sitting around in white rooms.

Full size men in full size rooms.

White. It is easy to understand, for them.

Men are angular, all legs and arms,

but rounded a little too, even the skinniest.

Even the leanest leg is full of curvature

and is round around the skinny bone.

The strange combo of angles and circles a man is

makes them sit awkward around in white rooms,

their legs and arms go this way and that way,



their spines have to do something  
stand up straight or lie down and close your eyes,  
it is hard being a man,

getting the plane geometry of your will  
to work in a round world  
after you've fallen out of the sky.

Poor men.

The sky was blue  
and blue turns out to be the hardest color to understand.

It is the color of God the Father  
who never shows Himself and is impossible to understand.  
It is the color of the sky often and often of the sea

but not always, nothing is always.

The men sit around in white rooms  
so awkwardly, they discuss the sky as blue

or they sing about the deep blue sea  
but what does blue mean when they sing it,  
it is everywhere and says nothing.

They shake their heads. Poor men.  
Some hold their heads in their hands and moan,  
some bow their heads between their knees and weep

thinking hard about God the Father  
whom they visualize as a blue man in a blue sky,  
tears pour from their eyes.

When they look around and see one another  
they feel comforted, the rooms are white  
they understand white and feel good about it,

men are at their ease in white rooms,  
never forget that, men have white  
as their favorite color.

White is famous for being not a color at all  
they say, they it is all colors at once  
or none. The things they say!

Men in white rooms  
trying to make their bodies comfortable,  
there are chairs but that's another story,

chairs and daybeds and sofas and chesterfields  
but once a man has fallen out of the sky  
he's never especially comfortable,

everything doesn't fit.

And now all the men have stopped falling out of the sky  
they are sitting awkwardly at ease

in white rooms since white is the shadow of God,  
because white is not a color they say  
so there is nothing to bother understanding.

15 July 2004

## **SLEEP**

Everything goes back to sleep when it can –  
isn't that spiritual enough  
for the Burnt Over District and the Hill Cumora  
and Letchworth and all the dark ravines  
folded west towards sleep—  
but seldom reaches it.

Sleep is the middle of the world  
and it's so hard to get there  
even though the earth is a great bowl  
inside which we prowl  
and it should be easy enough to let go  
and just slip or slide to the center  
where sleep is waiting,  
the swift horse that goes nowhere

but carries us to our desires  
seen clearly in the night  
as obvious as a smelly white rose in June

or a peony or a girl on a mountain  
or a mountain on the plain  
with wheat growing away from the volcano  
and the whole sea on fire

2.

You can't help it  
you want these things  
'they are there to be wanted' you say  
but maybe that isn't true you think  
maybe there's nothing there but you and sleep  
and that horse sometimes won't let you climb off

you wake up and want there to be outside you  
the secret things the horse showed you—  
this is Projection

all the philosophers of one sort or another  
who argue that things have no real existence in themselves  
are laughing at you as you stumble around the bedroom  
looking up the phone numbers of people you dreamed about

people who probably aren't even there  
and you're buying airline tickets and sketching  
with your nice blue pencil the floorplan  
of the house you want to buy  
build be buried in

you hold your head and think about things  
project them  
they soar out of your closed eyes  
and range around the world just out of reach

if you could touch them they would have no feel  
thank god for your failures

you write this down: in the middle of world there is sleep  
in the middle of sleep there is dream  
dream is a horse who carries you to hell

—it sounds right but you're not sure  
some days you can actually touch things  
or you think you remember having done so

on some day somewhere in the past  
and hell is just a scary name for  
thinking about things you can't ever have.

15 July 2004

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**(dreamt at dawn:)**

She studied their sturdy arguments,  
decided there is no god but the sea.

16 VII 04



=====

Somewhere back of what I understood  
was a movie of her doing it.  
Satin bathrobe, thick wad of Hungarian money.  
Pigeons circling the cathedral tower,  
bells, bellybutton, steam over the bathtub,  
she whimpered a little and the doorbell rang.  
At the end she signed a little paper: This is for you.

16 July 2004

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That the sentiment

dissolves the certainty:

Will is no better

than an old movie theater in Vienna

I remember that showed only old movies

about a Vienna that people remembered

or wanted to remember

because other, older, happier people remembered

Josef Schmidt and Richard Tauber,

will is just a terrible remembering

forward, into a sweet bleak land

of what could be other

if you didn't keep making it the same.

Sometimes a letter looks like a number

you can play the number in the lottery

you win a lot of money

you buy a horse and ride it in the Prater

the horse throws you and you get hurt—  
do you think the words are laughing up their sleeves,  
do you think that language laughs at us  
the way angels must  
given the lightness of their convictions

and because angels have no will  
and having will is what cripples us,  
each angel has a single word instead  
she knows how to speak and how to listen to  
whenever and wherever it is said,  
*linden leaf, fire on the moon.*

17 July 2004

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These sentimental essays  
appall me with their clarity.  
Being right is no excuse.

17 VII 04

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The fire is there,

believe me.

It's just waiting for some air.

17 VII 04

=====

Don't believe me.

Nothing of what I have read about angels  
strikes me as true or even likely  
though I like to read about them.

I think angels are ideas  
that for a moment inhabit men  
and move them to be clear  
to one another, or to care

or dare, or remember.

After that push, the angels  
withdraw into their own spaces  
which are *luminous permissions veiled*

from which they soar into us at need.

But whose need makes them come?

17 July 2004