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MEDITATING ON A PHRASE OF PETR DEMIANOVICH USPENSKII

Because of counting we know the rock
subtracted from the sheep – it's raining –
the strictly relevant is always self-postulating,
self-proclaiming – rain speaks for itself –
and children in Russia don't have to remember.

They're harvesting sweet corn round here now
and selling it to city folk in hypothecated cars
–anarchists serve corn to woodchucks under barns
subversively – o to unsettle any system, o angel–
“hate what you love,” what you love imprisons you,
sparrows ill-dissuaded from their seed.

27 July 2004

LORD BYRON

I said to Lord Byron: “isn’t eleven lines
enough to say anything?” But he went on
and on about structure & narrative & war.
I cut in and said, “What Catullus could do
in syllables it takes me lines to say,
you whole stanzas, is that the point?”
“Writing wants to go on,” he quoted,
“and it’s a grand way to fill a rainy afternoon,
plus you can sell it when you’re done,
read it to friends and be admired.
What else is life but sex and admiration?”

27 July 2004

=====
Hapless children
happy though
running to the jangle
of the ice cream man
who peddles by
summer evenings in
calm neighborhoods.
It is like time itself
coming along
singing its song
and bringing sweet
grace from elsewhere
in a weird white truck.
I still feel the magic
when I hear the bell.

27 July 2004

<late:> =====

It is the organization itself
that is Mary.
She came here
carrying her other child
and the child was Green Dissent.

That is all a culture needs to grow:
a structure and an energy that resists it

a blue sky alone with its shapely clouds.

*

Who came to Marseille?
Whose face was black?
Who is still living there?
I saw her walking in the shadows outside Arles
and later in fierce quiet westering light
along the tepid banks of Les Aigues-Mortes,
salt marsh they call the Dead Waters and still she lives.

27 July 2004

=====
A whisper
without a word in it
like the wind does

it still needs us
to understand
as if it had spoken

Know
in yourself
what I'm not saying

it said.
All night rain
some leaves still dry

here and there.
Surfaces, accidents.
Difference is

our only deed.

28 July 2004

=====
Why so little? Did I read
the wrong word,
the counter-factual admission,
do I believe
the rain's confession?

I miss you more than I will say.
I work on this, refusing
to be lyrical, or to let you know
how skilled you are in letting go
and I so clumsy.

My cord is rough, twisted,
my scissors dull. The frayed thread,
once cut, has to be licked,
pointed, worked one by one
through the bead of each day.

Sometimes it take a whole day
to get through a day
but sometimes I mostly remember.
Threading what is left
through what is left –
a heathenish spinsterish witchcraft of forgetting.

28 July 2004

AFTERMATH AT ARLES

In the arena
alone with the sun
we tried to talk
ourselves into now.

But then was too strong.
Stone upon stone serried
back up to the sky
where no one sits

ever watching
what does not happen.
That is the sorrow, isn't it,
when God is dead

there is no witness.
This structure is for mourning,
to focus time's ellipses
around us, bend us

to mingle with the unrelenting
day. Nothing to say
about pigeons sailing in and out.
We talked about what is left

when language is gone,
where we would eat supper,
candles in the dusk, bats
and dormice excited,

we're safe here in the sun,
in the stone, in the old city,
empire, history, passages
under the arches to nowhere.

28 July 2004

=====

Blameless

as dust.

What is

the plural of alone?

28 VII 04

LIEBESLIED

All they know about me
is the role I play.
they think that's me
and they may be right.

I have studied the mirror so long
that I have turned into glass.

Be gentle with me,
touch me with your fingertips
and show yourself to me.
Blow smoke rings round my face.

28 July 2004

<late:> =====

The stirrings.

Things know me,

know me late.

Scrape the barrel

there's a taste of water

a taste of air

wind out of air

fire out of stone.

Now we're all here

sweltering in the Palm House at Kew,

crossing the endless lawns

hiding in the beech tree dusk.

Lots of time. Everything

takes a hundred years.

28 July 2004

LIBRARY

the beginning
where the angel
takes a softer form
so that the smallest
reader thinks
for a season she
is the only one
who understands,
years later coming
to understand
how the shadow
of the sleek librarian
marked what book
on what shelf held
the doctrine she
needed to read,
the bears in their
golden forest, God
murmuring over
the barren mountain.

29 July 2004

THE POET AS CIVIL SERVANT

All decisions worth announcing.
Plainclothes dispatcher
baffled by his buses. Lent
somehow ended without Easter.
Who. Blame the woman
on the cell phone, blame the night.
Rubbish and cabbage, Nature
without permission. A matter
for the courts by now, voices
in the afternoon. Coffee break,
eccles cake, wait a minute.
In other countries I would wear a uniform.

29 July 2004

=====

pomps of organdy
put curtains on your window
to bury the light

29 VII 04

SONNET FROM THE INUIT

There is room here for remembering.
One of the lands I never met was Spain,
too hot, too many vowels, the boy said,
as if they needed to puff a lot
to cool their consonants –
mountain people use few vowels,
nasals keep you warm, shut up
about the weather you're always talking
language can't help it,
I grew up in its narrow streets
and sudden boulevards ending in deep space
even the sun afraid to shine there,
talk about vowels what else is light?

29 July 2004

=====

So many words to travel
light before a broken trunk
the bark peeled off halfway,
birch, sycamore – I touch
the wet underneath of wood
calquing Christ's miracle
into ordinary life, I come
back to life again. We must
believe in the Resurrection,
without it there is nothing to believe.

29 July 2004

<late:> =====

If the train stopped at every station

it would never get to Moscow.

Or when it did, Moscow would be gone

the way cities go,

under the lake or under the music.

When the train does stop young men get on

carrying cloth bags – they are going somewhere

and need things to be with them –

no man is ever enough

all by himself.

The bowling ball is needed or the flight bag,

briefcase, library tote.

We live by incompleteness

and we dream. The train

gets there. Everyone is waiting.

All the brides whose sleek noses and pouting lips

we admired in the catalogue

are waiting for us.

How can I explain that I'm only passing through?

How can I tell them I'm not who I am?

29 July 2004

=====

poulpo-boudeuse they said of her lips,
pulpy-sulky, as if a kiss
got stuck there trying to come out
but she wasn't sure if she loved me enough
or anybody, her kiss
might land on my lips or fly by my cheek,
an unexploded kiss
stuck between her and the air.

30 July 2004

COOL GREY MORNING BUILT TO UNDERSTAND

Are we built on wooden houses
narrow lasts, stilts from the marshland
all the seas congeal and the river
is a road of solid ice and we're gone too

crystals teaches molecules to crystallize
persuasion advertising, your smell
beneath the covers, cool grey isolate
why do the leaves bellyup to the rain

in chancery little men bent to inscription
I built a pulpit out of elm wood
and it runs on wheels, I take it everywhere
and preach, why waste my juice on talk

when I can testify magnify grandiloquize
benumb you with my gospelling
till you believe your way all the way
into my clutches, they are very good for you.

30 July 2004