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DECIDE

The ovens
make ash. Men some
sort of men
make ovens.

The sky makes itself.
One thing goes into the other.

Maybe there is no more.
Steeple, meet bird.
Ash floats on air.

We are responsible
for everything but wind.

17 November 2004

=====

Schumann starved himself to death
to get out of the trap. The cure:
empty body in an empty world
He found the door. Still needed the key.
His wife brought it: a glass of wine.

17 November 2004

(after a lecture/recital by Dr Richard Kogan)

=====
Counting one by one. Long neck
of a heron. He remembers

all the evenings by the pond
now green now grey now white

What can he say? Words
are wasted on things.

Be a wall, he tells me,
to support, protect, divide.

I am made of his instructions
frost and dead leaves in my hair.

17 November 2004

=====
I'm a child on a holiday is all.
Holi they saw was holy once

in my neighborhood it meant bread
yellow once a week the holy bread

golden Sabbath mornings how
every day is holy every day is bread

the sun tries to be the same color
every morning if it can

if I let it with my silver sky my leaden sky
all my skies my vinegar my spice

bread spice vinegar and oil
the sun is wine

pours on me now
in cold morning

I come home drenched with it
sun stains mottling my paws.

18 November 2004

=====

When I was actually little
I had a bottle of ink
and the lovely color of it was named *Azul*

how different it seemed from the words
I found mentioned on the other side of the box
I tried to write with azul but it always came out blue.

18 XI 04

SMARA

Enough memory.

In Robert Svoboda's *Aghora* we read
that memory is the same word as lust.

Lust turns into memory on the burning ghat.
When there is no corpse to remember
there is nothing to remember
there is nothing to desire.

That must be the sun's secret.
All its yesterdays burnt away
it is always new and always now
perfect compassionate impartial giving today
light light light
touching everything alive.

It unremembers. It undesires. It shines.
Be the sun.

18 November 2004

Why are there quotes around boys

(after Elliott Dutcher reading Achebe's wall)

But there aren't.

Boys left their quotes at home
stuffed in the left hip pocket of their jeans
the one boys never use
ever since boys visited the observation deck
of the Space Needle in Seattle, Washington
with their Uncle Irving and their Aunt Edith
who never got on very well together all those years
and upon removing a red spotted none too clean kerchief
from their pocket were promptly
hit on by a devious invert from Davenport, Iowa
who had taken pocket or color as some sort of sign.
Since that time boys knew that pockets were pure trouble
and so never used them at all,
except last Thursday night on their way home
from the CYO basketball coach's practice session
boys suddenly found these silvery grey quotation marks
hanging from their ears like earrings from Target
and were terribly ashamed.

O the horror of gender. O the horror of being boys.

And any one boy has to be all boys.

And such terrible handcuffs quotes are for such slim wrists.

18 November 2004

=====

The oak tree at my window
fair and sere, a rattle
of rust leaves with pale
insinuations of cloud.

I can have the window open,
I can keep the door closed,
there is a mystery to me
I bide alone.

The telephone has not been invented.

18 November 2004

=====
In this world the other specimens
are sparrows, dried hydrangea
almost colorless, in this world
the sun rarely sets but clouds are many,

light is a pearl. We suffer
one another just enough
to walk together down the pointless roads.

Why go anywhere but here?
Isn't this the very place I am?

18 November 2004

=====
I brought this rock
from somewhere else

it's Christmas card enow
for such as us

godless worshippers
at the altar of the merest.

=====

But this was not where the heart was heading when it began to speak. When I began whatever it was I began. Now that little cynic turn – not uncommon lately in my work – aggrieves the heart. We still have to reckon with the heart. The heart still counts after all our random number tables, our $n+7$ exercises, our fitness gym approach to composition. O we are a sullen solipsistical people. Poets, trash your nautilus machines and you threw out the miter boxes of your syllable slicing ancestors. There's always some plausible Devil with a new *technique*.

It's not about technique though, it's about pervasion. It's about the heart pervading what it sees, and being quiet enough to listen to language rising to pervade the heart, then saying that. Maybe we need to find a new way of talking about it, but that's what it is, and how it does. And does with us as it will, this skill we presume to flex but that flexes us.

19 November 2004

BAPTISMS

The ink
comes in a bottle

a cup with handle
a book of matches

scissors. A flame.
Shadows.

The shadows move.

Foot shadows, finger shadows.

A shadow is like
a shirt the body takes off,

a sock that falls from the foot.

Then
when it is all by itself,

beside us, over there, a shadow is over there,
when it is all by itself
it is a temple

temple of what temple of who
temple of teacups full to the brim and steaming
dangerous temple of tea.

But you, you are a cathedral
in a reasonable northern country,
you have a narthex, I have walked there,

you have a galilee, I have walked there
barefoot, casting shadow after shadow
away from me and onto you,

I tried to drown you with my shadow
but you have a font, baptismal,
the water that washes all the past away,

the past is the only place where sins live,

the past is the only sin

and into the water falls
a reflection of a dove or whatever that bird is
that nests up in the shadowy rafters and makes cooing noises
you can hear above the driveling priests

and the image of the bird
falling in the water
doubly baptizes the child

and anyone on whom this water falls
becomes a child.

20 November 2004

=====
But was it the Devil
who stood at the church door

crying Come to Mass come to Mass,
if you don't worship

there will be nothing left for me,
I live on your undivined desires,

your lusts that don't find their way to god.
Come to Mass and let the priests do it,

the organist, the cool guitarist,
the pretty children bringing offerings up,

let them all do it, music
and poetry of a sort and words, words,

and while they all do their stuff
your lusts will still be safe

from that miraculous transubstantiation
even priests don't talk about any more

where you turn completely into Him
and there is nothing left of me.

20 November 2004

(listening to Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*)

=====

If a child came into this corral
he'd see the real already made
where we see only dicey compromises
with wind and storm, we see buildings
ready to fall down, burn, blow away,
collapse from sheer weariness with us
and our uses. A child sees strong.
For a child, a house is part of the world.
For us, not even the world is part of the world.

21 November 2004

=====
Her face was too small for her head
her features too small for her face.

I can tell she is a ghost.
You can tell because
her eyes do all her thinking for her.

And all they think about
is coming for you. A ghost
is someone who is always arriving.

21 November 2004

=====

Waiting for the vase to fill with flowers.

Brass, from Varanasi,
and the flowers blue as udambara
blue as sky hydrangea
but small enough not to topple from
the slim conical ever-whirling vase.

21 November 2004

=====

Waiting for the train to come
building its trestle in front of it
as it coasts along your river

extruding bridgework over insolent lagoons
and startling shore birds
herons and hooded crows

along the Yamuna. Along the Mississippi.
Every river is the same river,
didn't your mother explain all that?

And every train goes to the same city.

21 November 2004

=====
Folding trees up
neatly into treatises,

translate the whole argument
back into Greek

insoluble because the birds
that sang to Anaximenes

have changed their chromosomes
and walk among us now.

Philosophy is the science of forgetting.
Ashes and an elm or two come back.

Forget what has been lost
and live in presence,

for pure presence, the shoemaker said,
I have worked all night

and only dawn comes in my window.

21 November 2004

=====

The clock strikes
like a tower falling.
Three angels are caught in the rubble
and have to leave their shadows there
crushed under brick.
We hear them stirring when we think we're alone.

21 November 2004

WHAT THE DAY TOLD ME

*for Charlotte,
her birthday*

It's the eyes. I think
it is the eyes
that tell me,
that first told me.

Sea green. Saying
something from the sea
and something also
from a land where no

sea wind ever blew.
What is this country
you give me
so fully, so easily?

There are so many houses
in you, destinations.
Never has such quiet
talked so clearly,

an encyclopedia of sense
all stored in stillness.
Keeping still. Silence
as an overture to everything

we come to know,
the quick intelligent
tenderness in you.

And that strange ocean

from which the light comes
to nibble at the normal
things, always doubting,
always faithful, always true.

Your eyes. I woke up
in the desert and was seen.
Everything from that.
Everything from you.

21 November 2004