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REPUTATION

Maybe to be
popular
makes a mistake

maybe the throb
of the machine's
the best applause.

12 January 2003

ALBIGENSIAN SEQUENCE

That doesn't.
And this does.

What this tells me
is another

you are another

and the sound of birds
landing on the feeder

intelligible, the distances
must be intelligible
otherwise a cliff
you throw yourself down

and all these other kinds,
parsecs and gloomy parasangs
Persian deserts
between your skin and your heart

j'ai perdu le monde
and no one found it

deserts made entirely of light

alone, like lacquer
quiet, like enamel.

Things refute themselves.

a word is a thing also
waiting in the shadowy trees
birches at roadside

a word strangle the one who says it

some words do

the sun is in my ordinary eyes

This kind of moonlight is the sun

this kind of darkness
takes the form of daylight
things all round me
I think I see clear
I think I can name

my assumption is pure sacrifice

oil on
your skin
needed
for my growth

we build by forfeits

these strange castles
you can barely see
athwart the air

we build by forgetting

we learn by separations

so I am ashamed of myself this morning
I have neglected those who love me
I have not answered my mail
and have ignored the summons of heaven
I have burrowed quietly in despair
like a snow vole in those drifts outside

but the words still walk outside my windows
I have lost the world but the world has not lost me.

12 January 2003

ORPHEUS COMPLEX

Difference

between coming

between coming close

and closing

between closing and something else

parodos, the tragedy

walks in

tough entrance

blameless sub-routine

there are memories

built in the machine

treebranched off forgetting

and these

suddenly

are all I am

anymore

overwhelmed with spontaneous details

parsing the past

tree branches let the sky through

birds shoulder past the light

the machine is memory.

Orpheus complex,

Maladia mia! Footnote

the first:

Oedipus is all about *seeing*, but his catastrophe
— the irreversible change of state — comes on him
as a result of *saying*: he speaks an oath rashly
to uproot the source of Theban pestilence.

Orpheus

on the other hand is all about *saying*, can say anything
that comes into his head and we call it poetry we call it song
the trees come dance around him

but perhaps the human world
finds itself uneasy with so much articulation
people stand apart and murmur, but they dance too

and his catastrophe
comes upon him through a rash act of *seeing*,
when he loses faith in the power of his karma, force of his song,
and spins round to check if Eurydice still was following,

of course she followed him, everyone in all the kingdoms
followed him, they had no choice, we follow music to the end

but he doubted, he turned, he saw
and seeing, lost her. Lost everything,
for without her, *senza Euridice*, he has no song, no force,
his road is ended, without that ‘broad justice’ of the woman
no poet sings,

and in his strange silence the women come
and recognize him not, or recognize him all too well,
and take their vengeance on all that music.

So Orpheus and Oedipus represent parallel tragedies,

the *hamartia* of each being using the wrong sense
to palliate common doubt.

End of footnote resume flow.

Catastrophe? No but wait. Eel under sedges,
the listening naga, excuse my excuses

I woke up blind

there was this mother

in my mind I thought was you

we opposite

Oedipus, we go to girl to get to her

it's not all simple as Freud freed

into the long mistake we listened,

there is still thunder in the weather, you Schnickelfritz,
you Schelm of somewhere, adaming along
as if I were a road and you a woman.

Brown branch the early snow! Clean portals!

Hung your curtains, sparrowbride!

Enough continuity, enough eternity

already, Philadelphia, reason street

I still go looking for, big sweating statue

of Danton, girls wait to get in movies,

I would wait on line for you

footnote two:

our line is their queue or tail or

German snake or French crocodile

things longer than they are wide
there are no lines in Milton's garden
scarce any flowers but the ones
that pelt their petals round your ears
and slip inside your collar, hussy,
a girl like you in these dim precincts
cherishing your lover on a slatted bench
o be this me to feel the air so!
he prayed, and it was so, fifty years
pass quick and footnotes end,

Tree fabulation still in business
ardent rascalry you pretty budmash scholar
you cute conniption water tower scarlet kirtled
drenched with moonlight you can't take off

he licketh from your leprosy

the subway does not run to you
this is my youth's burden
listen close an you would hear
a life her history squeezed between two palms
a horse comes into a room
and night falls, we eat outside
and smell garlic flowers on the marshes
then we all ride away on leaves

I waited so long before you were born
and still wasn't or weren't ready to decide.

Allow punctuation here

but what kind should it be,
Caxton's virgule
or a knotted curl
to tell the q of a question
are you mine
means are you listening?

The text makes saying into sense
not just that arrogant character the word,

trust the whole text, that democrat,
the brittle weaving
of pot shards into roof tiles against the rain
of course the mistral comes in with northern news
of course religion slumps over the wheel

grind your bone against the soft world
to say its shape
and I your guided forester intent on loathing
but only love, intent on losing but always win.

13 January 2003

DIFFERENCE

Yes of course I am ventriloquist
and everything she says comes out of me
but she makes it come, *the words are hers*
but the saying is mine, do you understand?

14 January 2003

WRITING INSTRUMENT

I suppose I could make my peace
with Bic round stic medium
and write my testament with it
you have to live by, reader,
since you read this far.

A cheap pen in a dying hand
I'll say, you can't get better
sound effects than that,
writing hurts paper, paper hurts reader,
reader hates writer, writer stops writing.
And then the testament begins,
it's all inside the clean white cylinder,
the pen, this little surgical instrument
that cuts its mild furrow (*son doux sillon*)
through the tractable wilderness of white
recycledom. Patience, we'll get
to your inheritance soon enough.
Or now, why wait, death's on the prowl
for one of us, for all of us, here,
this is the punchline of this philosophy,
everything I ever said is implicated in this word
I say next, any sentence recapitulates
every sentence ever spoken, the coming
into being of the mind that spills it
mouth by mouth into a dying world.

Do you think for a moment I would be saying

this if I were born in Bhutan or Bolivia?
Or that you could understand? Certainly not,
I am American poetry, I am wax.
Not me, not you. We are, for you write too.
You and I are what happens to language
on its way to having everything said —
which is a little like having said everything.

And then it happens back at us, as now
these disordered sentiments occur to you,
lasting testament of our shared hour
which in Greek remember meant any slice of time.

14 January 2003

FORGOTTEN UNIVERSE

It must be cave
turned inside out

tuned, a tuned space
inside something resonant

rock earth gape gap
told by my tongue

build my bell-tower
lick your cellar door

the opposite of universe is plural poetry

song abounding
in greatest silence

everybody saying
what no body knows

and then we do

Sunrise also is a catastrophe

“awake aware you scarlet

Christians green Moors blue Jews
saffron Heathens up
into the unsayable where
my word is hid”
thus spake, and skin listened

2.

thus spake, spoke, the past definite
of what we do, *nos molecules terrestres*

et lépreux, look close at the skin
on the back of your hand for a translation,

we all have it, we all are,
when we look close we see

the sick beauty of every corporal thing
anything with a mother, anything

in a web of causes,
anything you touch

and while there is (Davy filled the glass)
no lovelier retort than light

some mornings the pitchy question lingers
like grit in porridge — were it not better

for a man to have a millstone
or a maid to marry her mirror?

because light is (Paul explained)
a word and not a sentence,

it cancels silence without explaining it
(*Zorn's Lemma* tried to help us grasp this

by a long shot of snow becoming trees
while someone read to us but would we listen?)

(Bill took the glass, drank a sip
and gave all the rest to all the rest of us

whoever we turn out to be
when the dark comes on again and we can feel

(Peter called for convents to teach Endarkenment
the old law is harsh enough for me

who needs a sinner?
or as Lucius said Turn out the light so I can see))

caught in a mesh of comas, what I was saying
spilled into the sand, delta of random,

who will teach now the fond obscurity,
the woman in the well, the miracle of the blue light

that turned wood into water
the phone call from Athens, the sudden thaw?

3.

The whole world's secret is hidden in Brazil
— thus spake Omega,
hit-man of the alphabet
you know the story has to end
so you refuse to tell it,

nay, will not even think it,
nothing definite, no the
and no this and this and those,
a trillion singular instances
and no verb, listen,

I took the thread away
so you'll walk naked
and we will see us
as we are,
ludicrous, lovely, speaking a kind of Greek,

my fingertips evangelize your spine.

4.

No rule but rouse.
Rush. Real.

Give my regards to
means Let me look at her again

the dark convent where she tends
my once notorious blue roses

a Jew among Jews (Nachman
came to their house at night

his mouth full of narrative,
am I a prince that I should remember

all he told? A story means
to pass the time to keep from thinking

so that when a story's finished
you'll know directly, lucidly,

learnedly, liminally, legitimately,
experientially, experimentally,

exponentially, energetically,
innocently harmlessly reverently

matter-of-factly metabolically
know, just know.

Am I, a prince, supposed
to remember what my servant told?))

go unmake the story for yourself
and sleep in it

walk naked in your spine
among the winter hedges

the air won't hurt, it's what we breathe
the dark won't hurt you, it's where we're born.

5.

song of Calvary
too many nails

not enough wood

all those thorns
for one dead rose

6.

not be stopped
by no silence

the right thing at last
hide the word in a sentence

hide the sentence in a book
I do not love you anymore

because it finally understands in me
blue smoke in the morning when cold engines start

the air itself
listens to us say

listen! Orpheus means ear
share, shiver, his bear paws

scare your back but warm you
Orpheus means ashes, rust

a burnt Bible with no bullet hole
a book can float, father,

Orpheus is my mother
Orpheus is sleep without a coverlet

sleep naked, sleep talking all day long
Orpheus has to be asleep

an ear with a tongue in it
breath hot ear talk ear tell

skin gossip fall in and out of love
so easy a book in the mail

7.

it's all over, in her vision
Anne saw a man die she had never

seen alive, the vision spoke
instead of all her seeing, eyes

fixed on the Bishop of Ratisbon
she recited the last words of Iscariot

before his body cracked and spoke
what she alone of all my girls could hear.

15 January 2003

Notes and Identities: The final section remembers Anne-Catherine Emmerich's early Nineteenth Century detailed visions, articulately recorded, of the Passion of Christ. The Bishop was one of her interrogators. Earlier references: Davy is Humphrey Davy, visionary scientist. Paul is P. Adams Sitney, American scholar — his remark was not in fact about the word 'light' but the word 'process,' but his formulation makes sense. *Zorn's Lemma* is the cinamen film by Hollis Frampton — during the scene described, a voiceover reads from Robert Grosseteste's *Treatise on Light*. Bill is William Blake. Peter is Peter Lamborn Wilson in Anonymous's *Hieroglyphica*, 2002. Lucius is Lucius Apuleius, African magician and novelist. Nachman is Rabbi Nachman of Brezlav, author of mysterious parables. They come to your house and stay, making free with the porches of your ears. Brazil is the country that will constitute the essential America in two hundred years. Orpheus is the god.

THE ANTERIOR CRUCIATE LIGAMENT

you look to me

like a man trying to understand water

here is a tower where they keep shadows, and every morning they release a few over the
earth,

[16 January 2003]

