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SKY VOCABULARY

Not yet the tragic phone call when
or the other one when the girl's already gone
and the woodpecker is in their closet
it starts to rain. Somehow the word
mitrailleuse comes to mind, machine gun
but why feminine in French, I suspect
some Indians are moving in next door,
they look Cheyenne or Arapahoe
car doors slamming through the snow
hurting people's thumbs, arrogant steel,
blue-eyed straight-nosed Lesbian
first love my type like hydrangea or
homeopathy or horseradish in Vienna
she sits upright, thinks dark thoughts,
women worry more than rivers flow,
sepia drawing of a blue mountain. Forgive
me, I'm stronger than you how come it's you
who always unscrews the olives, dreaming
of lost manuscripts, the way Martha's Vineyard
turns up in so many drunken monologues,
how many m's in Menemsha, who owns the cliff,
makes me think of how people used to and some
still do with c with a line over it to mean 'with'
shorthand for the Latin tongue's little cum.
Don't ask me why a word so short has to get
even shorter, some people are always at work
trying to improve everything. Gelding the layabouts
as Shakespeare said, Elizabethan eugenics just in time.

22 February 2003

HARD WAKING

1.

Emerge, animal. The cloth
pulls aside, a brake squeals.
Something stops but it is not to see.

Every night I have a stroke,
the talking plates inside get dented
words change their meanings

you have strokes too, cerebral
incidents, a ball of wax
squeezed together from Dutch cheese

cortex means I think rind
bark of the tree the silent moon
I carry with me as I try to read

the upturned faces of the sky.
It's only when you're sick you know
how strange the ordinary is

training the mind to carry
wood and water from what well
sleeps slams the gate in my face

2.

Plates slip over plates
the words come out
morning has a queasy feel
the snow is empty

bird me bird me sky
alleviate the obvious
no see no say
inside my head a quite road

someone made a left turn in the night
squeal of night sweat on my skin
under the covers nausea and hunger
vanishing staircase the treads

disappear behind me, the ones ahead
have not yet formed, only each solitary
step is here, phones keep ringing
desperately reasonable wood

rain in my head cars go by
no one can see, I'm telling you
what it feels like to be me
when neither of us is here

I am the other side of me
the broken wing of a morning
I miss you so much
and don't even remember who you are.

3.

I try to figure it out.

I want to close my eyes
sit down in my long chair
seems the best policy

sleep is my medical insurance
doctor I'm broken this morning
I have no plans no plasma
I have to stand still a while

while the words stop
something broken in me
the quiet heals
I think don't we?

to carry water somewhere
answer the phone
on the brink of a decision
multiply answers

only the wrong ones apply.

4.

My eyes is a gap
I feel better already
writing myself back
into my story

for a while there
I was a goner
while the world
was coming

still is, still am,
sleep spurt
silver spill
eyelight opens the day.

Count the words and see how scared I am.

5.

And that's one reason Buddha left no book

He wasn't frightened. Fear
is the first ingredient of language,
of written language.

The task of the critic
is to locate
the primary fear
of any text, and then
the whole peerage of lesser fears and relative anxieties.

Am I home yet? The plates
grind against each other,
pressure straightens metal,
it begins to see even natural
to write this. Or this

The snow was empty

I listened to your voice again and again
till I'm sobbing with love and distances.

Everybody knows how to take care of a self
but I wake up with my head cracked open
broken window winter quiet coming in.

23 February 2003

FIGHTING FINDING

all the way here
restless cortex
sparrowed me waking
alternatives discerned
accelerate the interval
mountain prejudice
the count against
denial green silk
and all their kinfolk
dulcimer hollow
night claims
staked out shallow
armed sepulchers
wired for sound
announce the hour
love the portions
of thy subtle text
woven by the dead
to read the living

it is a boarding
house with no beds
a bookstore peddling
underwater certainties
drenched with longing
pagodas under ground.

24 February 2003

ANALYSIS OF A WOUND

Someone wound it
around the body
it squeezes
the wound you see
just the mouth
of it speaking
lips of the wound
language what it tells
talking to itself
can pain mean
can a wound be a self
does Jacob's
broken sinew something
mean an angel said?

Things mean
and mean things.
It hurts. Hurry
is all morning,
trains are wounds
wrapped round a city
the cruelest word
is to go, suppose
it hurts suppose it says.
How does listening
happen, word of a wound
gets heard how?

And understood?

“Bless me
before I let you go?”
you are my wound
mine alone
now answer me?
Another me!
Angelic anxiety
let me go
into alterity
to be no one
or not this one
longer, not this wound
this me,

let things heal
one another
was the angel
distracting
the Jew from the dawn
was it light itself
that hurt our father?

Lamed by the light
his dream creeps off
a man left over
from the night
a wound left from dream
the walking trance
where we hurt
myself what can that mean?

24 February 2003

DREAM WOUND

Into the dream wound
the thrust rose
hurt the color dark

but the other
wound is easier
what's left in the closet
when the clothes are gone

a hiding place
from all the people
you give some reason
to exist

they stare into the middle of you
seeing the back from the front

a dream is a coin
I give to someone else

having spent it all night
on those terrors
I wake up gasping from
only hours later
I recognize were pleasure.

25 February 2003

FRAGMENT OF A BRONZE FROM LURISTAN

Amplitude is everything
tortured by desire he remembers roses
for all the good it does, an animal
could at least make sense of weather

25 February 2003

FIRST RESORTS

By the time the weather wakes up
the canoe has slipped back cleverly
unnoticed into the boat house. Paula
standing there in wet cotton is surprised
when she counts the prows before her,
could rain be having happy hour,
so many boats? Behind the noisy bar
the Family Entrance opened onto
white clothed tables on which
sauerbraten fresh ham or roast turkey
later will be served, the first-named
juicy with red cabbage and a pale
baseball of potato dumpling built
around a captive crouton at the core
like some diagram of atomic structure
in the *Physics for Phil* book they finally
let him check out and carry home.
You didn't have to walk past the drunks
who in the days before television were awful
desperate for anything to look at
to distract them from the frightening
tunnel of their introspection down which
their sacrificial boilermakers coaxed them,
anything that moved could rile them into speech
old men barking from their creaking stools
at a child or a woman or anything weird like that.
Like something in Lucretius or Leviticus.
A child works through wonders and defilements,

eager for each. Sin me. Sin my skin,
sin me in my clothes, sin the secret places
of your body with me, I don't know who I am.
A child thinks I'm the only one who's ignorant.
The shouts of drunken men a liturgy I cannot
fathom, what god is this they worship
with such boring prayers. I think I'm right
being just a dumb kid stifling with anxiety.

26 February 2003

WORDS OVER WATER

1.

How can words

hold over water.

The sway. The way

out of Goethe's 18th

century vocabulary

19th century angels

flew, long lived ones

they hover still

above our waters

in shimmering Forms,

2.

to make persons

out of thin air

thickened inward

in your breathing

out against to

the world of form

where they endure.

Do this with speaking.

3.

so Dante did

generating character

locked in their function

prison house

of unchanging being

we need to free them
since freedom
means to change

4

so poetry now
come build
new futures for Farinata.

27 February 2003

DIFFERENCE

Language thickens, accretes
around a sense of person

where words cluster
there ego arises.

Endlessly delaying his own soul
the artist writes others

tentative identities
thickening in shadow under the lilacs.

27 February 2003

How much we have
to trust each other
to ask questions
so much harder
than any answers.

28 February 2003

RUNNING

The multiple voices of your kind of fugue
are like one flag flapping now fast now slow
now blowing inside out or curl
around the staff depending
on the multiplicities of breeze

as if no one can not say
what's on everybody's mind
no wonder we get it wrong
but still we get it
that's the miracle
that there is a first place
runs inside us
till the last day.

28 February 2003

SUDDENLY A HUNDRED YEARS OLD

and with this dazzling noontime sun on snow
it is dark in Warsaw where
intelligent ghosts of all our wars
cluster round the Ghetto Uprising monument.

Ghosts lick our fingers.
You know the feeling, somebody
is at your hands, doing something to your skin,
somebody not close,

somebody not even in a body
just enough of a thick wet thought is left
to lick your fingers softly
and leave no slime, leave nothing, really,

just a feeling you're not even sure is in your hands.

28 February 2003

OPERA

But at least, last, to listen
to this new opera
breaking my heart now
just you and me on stage

but you on one side me on the other
and no story to bring us together
and music silences our last hope
but the whole thing of us keeps going on.

28 February 2003