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THE FOUNTAIN

Why people spill the way they do
river of wise water and the young man
teaches the old man how to speak

not mother tongue but daughter tongue
we learn it from frustration
from the spew of ill-focused desires
in the first ten seconds of cosmology

this personal life. The first time I know
that I am me, language begins.

The elders fight it with all their powers,
silence the worst of them, that unclean

holocaust of feeling and meaning,
silence the child, be silent, the child
invents language but the priest answers
Be still, my voice is the voice of God.

When it is said that language
is passed down through generations
it is meant that the old attempt
to stifle the expression of the young
with tired forms and easy answers,
how sick I felt when I was young
when I was answered in clichés,
even clichés I never heard before
but shoved their nauseating wadding

round my face, to keep the new word
from opening my mouth.

What would it be like otherwise?
Sit on my lap and teach me how to speak.

*

Maybe there are certain sounds which are themselves patriarchal — hard to pronounce for any child — clicks, glottal plosives, the gristly consonantal clusters which are the virile strength of English or Russian — sounds that being hard to make repress the child's easy utterance. The old do not want to know what the young have on their mind. The old think they remember what the young feel, what they felt, but all they really remember is the repression, the means that their elders forced on them to mute their cry. And these instruments of repression are what they have to pass on to their young.

7 October 2003

MERCIFUL FLOWERS

snake through the first frost
surviving on memory alone,
that sun,

the stored heat stranded in their minds,
those sexy brains we see as colors.

That's enough October botany,
measure the turn of the sun
as it races around the pylon of the year
and is in the stretch now, leaf always less
between us, and hits my window now
at nine o'clock like a factory siren

and winter weaves its loving myth of doing things.

7 October 2003

**Through sun mist rise trees
blue day factory wall white
crowded buses cyclists step down
everything stops when everything goes
day all the machinery smiles**

8 October 2003

Was it different for you, the breath
remembering for me the factories
in Germany the red cigarettes
on the way to the airport a philosopher's
name lofty over the cookie works
the sugar man eating the rational
imagined deep within the crust
of language like colors hidden in fat
oil is the light of things a quantum
cursor prompting the hidden testament
the Third the ultimate Gospel implicit
all the while in the empty world
this hairy analysis stands partial witness
"the ever-thrumming presence of his
friends in mind consoled him for the images
that rose unbidden, phantasms of all
he had neglected beforehand to imagine"

8 October 2003

ABOVE

But think I wanted more than that,
Steeplejack, sky-farmer
opening the blue mill
mornings, for even the most bible-y
of book-slaves or as they say 'believers' —

in the religion of our north
there is no believing
it all is here

 this field, or *pagus* that makes us pagan,
the same force that makes the cars go by
and pollen vex the serenity of droning bees
to go and get some —

 ever and ever

we live here and let you in,
is that not religion?

8 October 2003

LA PARRAINE

There is still so much asking
that the skin you touch
may be your own tomorrow

everything you hear reverses
the strategy of yesterday
to have been one with this
you think, cathedral or fluent
silk charmeuse or that tree
over there, slightly awkward
likely ginkgo where two small
dogs jabber at each other
outside the handbag store
of course there are colors
in the window and every single
one of them is one more ancient
name for god when we were
pagans and of course I love you
of course a winter evening
is bright with city smoke, lucid
mist and the blue hour
laugh you home from work
of course of course and it all
was real you got your wish
everything touches you.

8 October 2003

Deep mist rising, trees turn color in it
beginning, late beginning, as so
often another, year is this one,
we see by pieces the not seen —

you call this now? I call it
when dawn remembering falls out.

deep mist rise trees
late color year see
what's not seen now
dawn break light remembers

9 October 2003

YOUR INVITATION COMES TO THE WRONG MAN

Revelry, I guess, you plan, that sad machine
they use against the night, their musics
the lepers' clappers they sound to warn Unclean
Unclean! we are not happy in who we are

so we come stumbling out loud into your town
desperate for alternate identities, dance with us,
sick with contagious appetites we rule the world
in the tumult of our malady.

9 October 2003

POINTING TOWARDS SOMETHING

Of course men needing
semaphores salute you
sequence processing releases

naval stores, that mushroom
called "Heaven Underfoot"
cloud white inside and who

beyond weebegone with dream
but speckled Autumnus with
porphyry drizzle, warty cap.

Cut the pine then down
as Latin conversational poetry
sails away on calm sea grammar

a tree must fall to rise as mast
tragic religion of blond necessity
the brown sfumato of Calvinist glory

a thing moored in presentness
but not actually here, cabin boy
of the most high, waves

according to the polls death wins
spell childhood with new stones
there are lesions on the old lemons

way worn? shelf-embittered?
hedge to shelter little schools, Erse
under bayberry, picture us a pair

heard and hearing and no one speaks.

9 October 2003

LAPLAND NIGHTS

I don't know what day this used to be
Saami by their fulvous reindeer
snapshotted in permanent sunlight

how can they live on the surfaces of things
I couldn't, I am a secret person
I am hypodermic, I am long.

9 October 2003

As I was explaining to my students why I didn't do the assignments I'd asked them to do, my explanations sounded fishy, and I felt shame. To feel ashamed inside a dream is a hopeless dance, I'd best do better waking. So now sitting down to the morning I forced myself to confront the word, to perform (as I'd called it to them, awake, last week) a meditation on the word:

YELLOW

Everywhere I look, tiny turmeric stain — curry— beside my white shirt button, wet small maybe maple leaf on my table, morning, hello, the deck, the flowers of fall, yellow — it's time to be awake again, the outside dream time, the world. When I look up, the linden tree is full of it, yellow, and the owl slipped by huge in yesterday's morning with yellow underwings vanishing above, beyond, inside the woods that bound me, I waited to see his exit but he came not forth, only the rising sunlight yellow in morning mist.

Today the mist has no yellow, yellow is inside, but this cool close sweet mist out there feels like the color of my eyes much diluted, I mean looks like this, this has to be looking, looking is to world as feeling is to inside, the world is the other, what else could it be, the world is yellow. Yellow owl yelling in the night or low over morning trees ascending slow yellow. You all know yellow, but what it's hard to know is inside some one, inside where no yellow is. The caverns of Wall Street down there inside this very body, the Louvre and battlefields and oysterbeds and lava, no yellow. Hence all the machinery of religion to bring sun-yellow to the dark heart of this one or that one. The good sweet decent heart that never stops working, reward with light. Yellow brought in.

Yellow means to be as big as something is. Almost fifty years ago Amy asked me what is your favorite color? Till she asked me I had none, and I answered what I suddenly knew, yellow, yellow or orange, yellow, but yellow like the sun, like the yolk of an egg. Yellow was the enamel pot she brought me from Chicago for me to make coffee in following her method, that's why she asked about color, we want to know about color when we want to know about somebody else. People wear the colors that they feel or are or want to be, all of that is useful to the anxious beholder. Clergy tend to wear all of them the same color, so when they all wear the same color, color is irrelevant to the

person who is wearing. The same-color is denying the soul-color of the person, the person is irrelevant, costume wants to reveal only the color of the function: monk, rabbi, nun, lama. Colors fade. Vows grow weary. What did they start out to be?

Amy's yellow bain-marie she cooked her coffee in, brought almost to the boil and covered instantly, a covered pan, Martinson's coffee, blue —the better— can with a yellow oval on the deep blue, a quality item in those days. Yellow I told her and didn't know if it was true, but I let it become so, do I plead guilty now so many years, it felt right when I said it, "Yellow," I said, but not pale yellow. Strong yellow.

She asked and I answered, it was a test I somehow passed, but it took the rest of my life to pass it, it always does, the exam is never over, not even now, yellow in here with me and blue out there with you, October mist and everything has changed places. Yellow means I don't belong to little girls or angry boys, yellow means I walk alone to see the waterfall, learn from it how to do what does itself, let it find its way in me. Yellow means I'm the size of myself, like Olson said, yellow has woe in it too, then, and ill and well both, but all things interpenetrate all things, yes? or no? *semina*, the seeds of all things are mixed together, the soul teases them apart and over a thousand lifetimes plants each seed with its proper kind, the way we go together. You and me, the only you I mean.

Today is the day to reap yellow, the yellow long planted, word or color, sound or shout or sheet of light, reap the yellow flowers. Yellow means the outside stays outside, yellow means I do my work and bring it to the market and leave it there till the blue hour comes and money is no more. There is no money at night, no yellow, no gold, only memory is the money of the night.

10 October 2003

THE FLIES OF OCTOBER

The flies of October
have awkward wings,
what happens to them,
they change like the jaws

of salmon leaping
up the last time,
the body changes
on us, October,

the buzz they make
changes too, the angle
of their wings
controls the pitch

the lazy bebop
of dying time
makes them frantic
against the glass

they collide, fall
dodder on the windowsill,
come back full force
to find anything

over on the tabletop
lull juddering
on the edge of a book
the flies of October

cannot read,
even our hearts
are closed to them
just as ours are

to one another,
why do we hate them
so much, a dozen
of us lovers around

the table who don't
know each other's names
watch the flies of October
bother us

with all their dying,
other people's lives
are such a pain
to be part of,

when they intrude
on the hollow place
inside us from which
every feeling

has been banished
and suddenly stupidly
I was crying then
for my mother my father

the flies of October.

10 October 2003

ALTERNATELY IN HYPERSPACE

Be there for me
not necessarily with me
with anybody is so hard
isn't it, whereas a word
bathes us in its milk

when we are there
in a space so small it
has to be inside one of us
though both of us are there
in it, both of us in it,

if not together, no not
together, no more than tennis
with the pretty green ball
careening off the sky
to come to you from me

eternally, and back
to you my dear what
does it matter if they call it
a game or say these are only
words, it's words and we
till the end of space
are the ones talking.

10 October 2003

(CIPHER)

No person I know comes close to an **angel**, though all the best of them usually **can** bring me a sumptuous message, some even **have** welcomed me inside the message they are, **more** like swimming off Waikiki in virgin waves **than** reading some book about gods or girls. **One** woman I met claimed to carry a **message**. I followed her to a park, asking **if** she thought her words were for me. **There** are no words, she said, maybe some **were** lost along the way, since it took me **two** lifetimes to find you. I have other **messages** too, and spend my lives looking. Then **there** were pigeons around us, we fed them. **Would** you tell me what my message is? **Be** patient, what we are doing now is **two-thirds** of it, and the rest, like **angels**, is whatever you were born to say.

(text plus-seven. Original from a contemporary cabbalistic Rabbi.)

10 October 2003

READING MY RUNES

Robertkelly

On the god road

Tyr wields the birch rod,

whips the fire

a year and a day,

the lake silences with ice,

melts, freezes, melts

again, the yew tree stands

dark, permanent

beside the changeful waters.

10 October 2003