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VISITORS

The blue flowers
have come to me instead

at the edge of the woods
but on this lawn

lawn is lawn that is one's own
they have massed

big as two sheep
browsing, the blue

small flowers gather
to look across at me

I am sustained
by this conversation

the oldest quest
pure listening alone.

Geese
roll overhead.

11 October 2003

ABBEY

To know the places of sacred touch is trust. To have knowledge of A person through the *accident* of flesh is to know a person on the same terms he knows himself — chest, hand, loins. To want to touch people is to want to know the world as they know it, to contact the *field of knowing* that the body is.

To walk around the church. To slip inside and hover like a thought in the shadow of a broad column. Way up ahead is the shimmering twilight of the high altar, the sanctuary, to study that from far off, but not penetrate. That is no business of mine. Those golden shadows of candle flame are for the deeply baptized, the wholly accepted. I am not one of those. I have to stand apart, down in the nave among the whispers. I am not the priest of such an altar, such god as may live there, but I am inside the temple of it, the embodiment of that god. I stroke the wood carvings, the stone carvings of holy bodies, the text of local stone my fingers read.

There is an eternity of incense of beeswax to smell, and I can smell flame itself that nibbles at the air on slim white tapers. I do not climb the altar. I do not penetrate the crypt. But I do kneel down. I kneel and kiss the curious porphyry stones inlaid to form a cross which is a knot, a knot which is a maze, there where the transept crosses the central aisle and the altar is not far.

By kiss to untie that knot and know the road that had been folded in the maze.

To know a person in the body her consciousness has put on for this appointment. To touch is courtesy, to stroke the hidden arguments of flesh is mere civility.

11 October 2003

If there were only one left
would it be a house or a horse?

11 X 03

(ABSENCES, 1)

I stroll through maples
a kind of magnate
among nomads

hoofing it
all by myself

I promenade between the solstices
in all this profundity

my wristwatch ticking

11 October 2003

(Absences are poems whose main words, apart from the eternal little ones where meaning rises, were not used by Shakespeare.)

WALKING

My whole life has been a walk one day
from the back door to the corner grocery
past the maple trees by the gas station
with sea at the end of the alleyway.
Just this has taken all these years
to get the right angle of approach, the right
desire, the right list of things to notice
till all the things that happened around me
were things I thought. Leaf shadows,
portable pain. A small hunger
never mended. Never admit
what I was looking for. I let my legs
show me the way. The moon never lies.
I've only been walking ten minutes or so.
I know the grocer has a thick wheel of cheddar,
I think of him cutting a piece for me,
Already I know what it will taste like,
or think I know. Already I pretend
it is the cheese I came for. Pretend it's feeling.

11 October 2003

REMORSE

Looking at the words I wrote
an hour back — temples, torches,
touches, flames — I see nothing
but what I remember, the hand
writing its dark arabesques
across a greenish page, no more
like words than the fallen leaves
outside, my eyes are focused
somewhere else, not on this
convulsion of simple line across
eternally blank space. Because
writing is a point that moves,
a feeble pirouette against
triumphant light that cancels
shadow all day long the way it does
if we don't burn (ink means
burning) words into the world,
endarken them against the easy light.

11 October 2003

Asunder, as a letter is
when you take off a foot of it
and make e into f.

12 X 03

MEANING

When you rip open an envelope
and snatch the message inside
what gets left out, what falls out
of the envelope and blows away
while you hunt through the words
for what they are saying
instead of seizing what she said
who sent them, something
in the act of inserting the letter,
licking the flap, sealing it,
something in the solitude of not
reading, just waiting to sense
what the paper says, the curlicues
of love that spilled the message
you spoil by reading.

12 October 2003

UNPREDICATED, SILENCE FILLS WITH EVENTFULNESS

copper cup wrist warm

rain color no rain

tea color leaves ground

small hill small sky

who close not here

sounds inside name hurrying

call people street one

door sounds finally finally

LA FIN

The terrible story I have been telling about you
all these years dissipates. You take your body
and go home. I am free of predication, a man
free as newspapers, like a lawn without hammock
or a coast unbothered by a sea. A certain quiet
grief there is in being void of narrative.
For one thing one is at the mercy of analogies,
those seeds the gods leave in the feeder for us.

12 October 2003

BE HOME IN TIME

Be home in time for Halloween
said the Aurochs to the Year

because a length of time
is always sinewy like an arm
an flabby like a ham and
hard as a knucklebone and
could go anywhere

time is what it takes
to unpack space

every animal
is still waiting for
time to come home

we're all alive right now
brothers climbing down the stairs

the bones sing.

13 October 2003

THE SOFT WHITE STRING THAT BAKERS USE

Committing some self
to the improbable, a baker
begins to wonder why
his dough begins to rise.

His daughter Veronica
helps him think, she
sits busy on the floor
by the kneading trough

not kneading, she feels
the air change “along
my skin” she thinks
“the same as in,

everything eats air.”

The bread is trying
to become her. She is
trying to be her father,

such a man, the
strength of his arm,
the pressure of his hand!
In the over the heat

is waiting like the sun
under the horizon
in a town with no churches
he looks at the woman

at the floor at the window
swelling with light
and still doesn't know,
he still doesn't know.

13 October 2003

HAVING COME BACK FROM THE EXPEDITION

Folklore carries me
past any reasonable answer
out where the question itself
rages, herds of it drifting
westward with the sky itself.

13 October 2003

TEXTS are wandering

between the magnetic poles
suspended in movement

which is why they quiver
as he reads them and he blames his eyes
eyes so tired at midnight
when he puts the scrolls away in the ark

but the words are still nomad
quivering inside him
and he reads with closed eyes
the peregrinations of the Mercy
among the thoughts and images
that people his mind

he reads them also
in the wilderness of dream.

14 October 2003

APOLOGIAE

Every profession must excuse itself before the suffering in the world.
And those who practice two professions must make two apologies.

In the face of that suffering, the executive and the handyman,
the priest and the accountant, the millionaire and the pauper are all guilty,
guilty the doctor and the whore, the actor and the poet, guilty.

Each apology must blend the quality of that profession
with the dignity of the person who makes the apology.
All persons must learn to inherit their own dignities
and perfect the skills of their professions: to make the perfect apology.

When this apology is proffered secretly but in an open place
as someone might make a resolution silently under the sky over the city square
it is called taking the first mask off, and it creates
a slight healing effect throughout the world, like a cool breeze in hell.

14 October 2003

ARS COMBINATORIA

can that be

the man himself

divided into his instances: his passions by their mysterious algorithms

haunting the interior lexicon

desire plucking out

the way it does

this image then that — in/mage, the *named thing*

built out of words in the blind part or ceceity of mind.

14 October 2003

LANGUAGE LETS THE MIND

see what it thinks.

Co-nascent, the image and the word?

No. In the beginning (we are taught by the First Linguist)

was the word

and the word moved towards ($\pi\rho\omicron\varsigma$) the god

(as if god were the first image the word intended,

the first thing the word spoke?)

That sacred *pros*! 'To' or 'towards,' that the word was not

something done but something doing

something with motive power,

a word is on the way,

a cause instead of an effect.

And word hides, and hides forever, its mystery —

does word imply a speaker, or only a listener?

You make me speak.

Empirically all our speech is pretty vain. But perhaps our listening is not.

Maybe we will hear it to the end,

this word, that word, will

suddenly speak.

What ne'er was thought but now seems first express'd.

14 October 2003