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Now all the brawling messengers

have slept back to heaven
and we have no religion.

Now the fox

knows more about the earth
than you do. You have lost
the key then thrown the box away.
Now there is nothing but war.

All they ever meant was
be kind to one another
and let your mind settle
till like still water
all the sediment of hurt
sinks out of it,

out of the world.

We are infinite, but we sleep.

10 November 2003

The ethical thing

wants to carry
astonished
at the unknowable
face of the other
all I can is love

words make beauty
commas restrict

did Christ use
punctuation? no

for we are lords only
of interruption

while the truth
speaks steadily
word after word
like a radio in an air crash
plenty of juice
in those batteries
long after any
pilot is dead

words come from nowhere
words are always here

we shape them
to our peril
into sausage sentences
we compel each other
to swallow down

whereas the only truth
is listening naked
as they rise to speak
in and of you
while you sit on the damo
benches of autumn
neighborhoods or lie
on your back in prairies

letting the sky
listen to you think.

10 November 2003

MAN WATCHING WOMAN ON PRAIRIE

Suddenly I wanted to be
between your body and the earth
listening to you both

as you lie there and watch the sky
the sky is your perfect holy other
unknowable adorable

and you might be that to me.
That is the simple story of this opera.

10 November 2003

NOVEMBER MORNING

When the sun comes up it's already afternoon
the miracle animals have hidden themselves
so all you see is shadow, but shadow loves you

it lies along your thighs as if the tree
meant to touch you, or the light itself meant to
and sent this swart ambassador to be so bold

even the light, even the light, nothing you can trust.

10 November 2003

ARMISTICE TUESDAY

On the day of the war god
the war stopped.

But Mars is more,

Mars is a dancer, a desirer
a spokesman for language itself,
yazik, tongue lick, tongue tell,
a lightning flicker at the tower
till the tower tells.

I was Mars once, and an other.

11 November 2003

You know that madness has crept — however mild wheedling merely insinuating
humble telling its beads — into the citadel when you can't keep out of your writing
sentences beginning with "I."

"I" is the name of madness, and a wolf.

"I" is at the center of some self that tricks you into thinking it's you, and there you are.

But it's never you.

Sanity lies in remembering that "I" has nothing to report, nothing. And that all your job
is making things up, things that "I" knows nothing about,

things that turn out, like Homer or Ezekiel, to be more or less true.

11 November 2003

ENEMIGO MIO

Already I hear him muttering
in a room down the hall,
he thinks he knows something,
he's coming to tell me.

I arm myself with anger & open the door,
peer through the crack.
And it's just a little boy
playing in the hallway, talking to himself,

telling himself a story about the moon.

11 November 2003

HURRYING

I have a minute more
some remembering to do
before I dare to write a name down
let alone yours

on this crinkly envelope
and ship it to the other side
of whatever it might be
that lies between us

blue for the ocean
or the sky we suppose
a sympathetic magic
to bring far things close

close as the air
the part of the sky we breathe
so close we can't even
see its color,

to get the words there
all the way to you
before some bird
hawks them out of the wind

and you get an empty
envelope at breakfast
over there in otherstan,
for it is you, why

be coy, you my words
are trying to find,
not because I have
something to tell you,

no, I told you long
ago everything I knew,
but something is trying
to talk to you,

something that craves
your reception, time's
own kabbalah whispering
the meanings surround you,

the heart is a window
in your own house
no matter the hour
a window full of light.

11 November 2003

Der Abschied

All this about touch
nothing of relent
this man is in a phase of letting go

why do the old tropes
hang out in dirty clothes
gibbering their weary shtick
in his clean rooms?

because he set a wind
to scour his house
and still a prairie damp
is all that's showing

he feels it rising though
a wind from Muckish
from Tiger Hill from Hegel
a wind full of explaining
a wind full of forgetting.

12 November 2003

A Translation of Der Abschied:

Because this is where the God is housed now,
the star machine has whirled
into a new stanza of relinquishing

austere and simple as a piece of wood

it took so long to grow its straight grain
to set its bark to row to be the tree he needs

sapling in a bare place
managing a branch or two: the

contract of the birds is always
welcome, always fly away.

He's saying goodbye now
but in a quiet voice
that does not mean to frighten,
just murmuring more stuff
about trees and birds
as usual, but meaning he is gone.

12 November 2003

Because the incomplete

“Because the incomplete
is worse than the absent
I say I will not swallow this half-a-loaf —
then find I’ve done so and wake among crumbs”

Not clear what he’s driving at here
so many mistakes already
he’s scared and can’t say so,
bored with his terrible privacy

overworked, exhausted, talks all day long
the words nobody listens to
then writes all night the words nobody reads,
old man Cassandro with his megaphone.

And they praise and pay him well
for the words they do not care to hear.
And over the doorway of his cubicle inscribe
Keep talking to the dark, and leave us be.

12 November 2003

When you hear geese flying overhead
that is me
saying hello and goodbye at once
my love
in my original Old Irish poetry.

12 November 2003

I talked with the boy about idols,
he was concerned about idols,
it was quiet and tired in the exhausted
room such stifling heat I prayed
but only now know what I wanted to say,

stop trying to know god
and let god know you.
Be quiet and listen.
Sometimes the best thing in a book is closing it.

12 November 2003

TREASURE

You must know the last thing on the list is treasure, is connecting with the truly old, fountain pens and penmanship, postage stamps you lick with your tongue and press with sticky fingers onto envelopes that actually move in space from here to there, the last thing on the list is there, where God is waiting huddled by the campfire, brewing coffee in tin cups, waiting for you, frying fish for you, nothing on his mind.

13 November 2003

NAMING THINGS

Name the kivvutz for Levinas.

Name the book for the one who reads it
Guide for the Perplexed. Where, o Guide,
would you be without me, the baffled?

Or Guido's canzone, of course
you can't answer till you're asked.

Listening (*lassening*) is only good
if silence is a permeable membrane.

The only statements that are purely nonsense
are answers that come before the question.

Time arrays sense. Name the hour
for its smallest basket, at midnight

I found half a loaf of bread and knew you.

13 November 2003

Why can't it be

simple as it is
a piece of wood
a book you open

and there I am
always on my way
to you and never
getting there

there is no there
no line to follow
it is as simple
as again

again a leaf
out of a haiku
lands on your hand
dry and scaly

the beautiful stuff
still remembers us
and shadows even
never forget to kiss

our glad innocent
seldom complaining
hypersensitive
promiscuous skin.

14 November 2003

By contagion the word takes on meaning

the way a ship takes on water.

Words leak, are permeable,
fill up with bilge. Only using them
hard will clean them out again.

Keelhaul the words. Contagion

from things, people, times.

Swastika once meant 'sign of good fortune.'

Love once was a city spelt backwards
and meant the stars. I once meant
a man who comes over the fields towards you

singing maybe, smiling as he comes.

14 November 2003

[natural eyes/4]

But what if tumors they call benign are growing out of sight, so far, between the roots of your hair, snug under the bone of your skull, gradual, gradual, a new face that comes to become you? Now in your mind's eye (or skull's eye, the seeing patch inside your brain, that's in there too, that too, it's all there) you see a bloated rubber mask of Ginger Rogers as a very old woman, pale, all harshly rouged and blonded, but what's in your mind is the grace of her slim hips dancing, always backwards, in the glorious fakery of The Continental, whatever, production number, eternal, music is a beast too, never forget that, opera is a swelling in the forehead, a lump in the throat you'll never swallow all the way down, a heart broken the way a mirror breaks, with a lot of noise and blood and splinters all over the bathroom floor.

14 November 2003