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JUSTICE

There are some measurements
left in the world after Paul died
or stretched across Libya
in an older household than Shell
than Amoco a tortured history
no one knows.

To look
out on a field anywhere in the world
is to hear the details
of everybody's history
all the human pain recited
endlessly in an ancient language
you don't know a word of,

the wind and all the rest of time's
elegant machinery. Effects.
Elves. Passengers. Midnight
tribunals where you stand
personally accused of all those crimes.
Every crime that ever happened
laid at your door. And everyone alive
is out on bail.

Research. Study Africa,
Jersey marshes, especially
my backyard. That's where the evidence is,
and I need all of it.

This is not my first pleading before the court.

Plaidoyer. May it please you to hear
and know that you are on trial too.

We all did it. Passive voice.

We have all had it done to us. The fact.

21 November 2003

I have an intense interest in the collaborative, to break down the old boundary, one book = one man, to break that convention and let a text be two or more people talking, really talking, with and to and from one another. This kind of collaboration means listening hard and thinking fast - even if the concept of real-time is nibbled at in favor of immediate written responses to one another. I think a whole book of two smart attentive friends talking closely about anything would be amazing. All the more so if the subjects are of a sort of instant charm, that challenge more than one obvious reading, since the two voices can sort out their own individual and often ambiguous responses, share and respond to those in turn - in a few pages, a comprehensive array of judgment parades into view. Imagine two people talkworking together over: the Museum of the Deported, in Paris. (One notices that the Marais is being turned into pedestrian malls - the museum artifact made tourist-friendly.) The Vietnam Wall Memorial. The winners of the Nobel Prize. The Literary Avant-Garden Party (the embeddedness of the literary a-g in profoundly middle-class professions and attitudes towards success. I find sinister and hilarious the daring experimental novelist who strives to change the human condition and enlarge our self-awareness but in fact wants nothing more than a good review in the TLS and an assoc.prof. job at Ohio State. How feeble the sons and daughters of the Spirit have grown. At exactly a moment in history, if there is history, when we need the violence of self-sacrificing intellect, the Dostoevsky, not the Updike. We need the willingness to see a whole new thing.)

Another barrier I want to break down is the one-language. I want there to be texts written in two languages at once - for a year I've been working on a collaborative text with Birgit Kempker called Scham/Shame, where she writes mostly in German, with some English, and I the other way around, using the shame of (mis)using another language, using the shame of embarrassment, the shame of being inarticulate in an art which is supposed to be all about articulateness. So I think cross-language dialogue can be the richest sort, even if both are using or winding up in just one of the languages.

FOR CHARLOTTE, ON HER BIRTHDAY, 2003

The things that wanted me to tell you
such plain things, the scour
of November sky just after rain
yesterday when the sun came back,
how the back door shudders
when a heavy truck goes by,
the wind chime speaks Japanese
all night long and who listens,
we go to sleep too late, we talk
all through the day, the quiet lawn
sometimes is a rebuke, all scarred
with ungrassfulness as if the earth
wanted something more direct,
less reputable, less respectable,
and came right through, to talk
with us, everything, crows
wait for us when we wake, late
too often, but the light's enough,
even now a month shy of winter
where you suddenly were born
that year when everything changed,
everything wants to talk,
that's why we're so busy, so many
things to write down, to shift
from one sense into another, from
no language into some language,
some language into this, the Greek
one's native language really always is,

imponderable mystery of what
so easily slips through our lips
and you know how to inscribe
moment by moment into quiet
paper quiet house, and thinking
to say something about loving
you but winding up by saying
just a little part of why, closeness
to the actual, the purity, when
a thing and a word have lost
their distance there is no difference
and all that wants at last to speak
hurries with me also humble
to the affirmation of your being here.

22 November 2003

SACRIFICE

making something holy

but holy is *sacer*, which is holy in the sense of being other, the *sacer* in something reveals or tells about the quality of otherness inherent in it,

sacer = not ordinary, not everyday, not social, not personal, always frightening, a devil is *sacer* too, a sacred monster, an apartness

sacrifice sets something apart from the ordinary,

sets something or someone apart from ordinary usage, ordinary use.

People now have a strong urge towards the holy, towards the other — the thing beyond conversation, television, the mall, the thing beyond driving, beyond music and art, even beyond fucking, certainly beyond the ordinary gestures of societal religions. All those good things gesture towards the holy,

but we don't believe it, or only for a moment or two.

But when someone pierces tongue or labia and walks through the streets with that tiny difference pronging through the flesh, that someone knows: *it is not ordinary where I am*. There is a difference that I have summoned into me. I know it came because it hurt, and the hurt lasted a while, and I lived with the pain until it became part of life and passed away from my attention, the way old pain does, its signal lost in the body's static, but its sign still there, a tug in the flesh, a flash of metal when I speak or when a lover opens me.

My read is that tattooing (otherwise why not just draw pictures of blue deer along your arm, or have a friend write odes along your back?) is not about the symbol or picture or message inscribed, but about the inscribing itself. It marks you. It signs you with a sign of otherness, which on the one hand recruits you to a tribal group of The Tattooed, and there is surely some comfort in such belonging,

but on the other hand it distances you from every other person, into the chancel of your skin where some kind of ritual is written that no one ever felt but you, though you may let everybody, or a few privileged intimates, or nobody at all witness, depending on what region of your skin has been mapped by this new contract with the holy.

But this urge for the holy must be behind it all. People giggle and are embarrassed or defiant or rueful in recounting their moment of sacrifice, when the metal went in or when the indelible word was written on their flesh, but we know that the quest that drives them is the quest for making themselves holy.

The primal gesture of sacrifice in our [language's] tradition is the god Oðin, *who sacrificed himself to himself*.

And that is what they replicate with their tattoos, their insertions temporary or permanent, their copper hoops and silver studs —

think of the differences: the studs set in chin or lip or eyebrow or ear — completely public in their statement. The studs set in the tongue or rings in belly button, these are partly private partly public, flash forth unexpectedly, like a glint of godliness through a dull church window lit by sun. The pierced nipples, foreskins, labia — these are offered only to the glance of lovers, or those attendants of the underworld called doctors and undertakers.

Different registers of sacrifice, Masses private or public, low or solemn high. What the sacrifice always does: to remove this skin, this man or woman, from the commonplace, offer him or her to the deities.

Who are the deities? A pierced nipple is a prayer, an ardent prayer in a world where the gods are lost. Religious people look at a tattoo and shudder, but what they shudder at is the purity, intensity, absurdity of prayer itself.

DEMANDE

What we want
is just a footnote to what is

and what is there
is an old white horse
standing by a rain fence
eating roses 40 years ago

everything that is
is old already
and still young
in the sense of horses

how they are
is a bird will be

or listen anyhow
to everybody afterwards

how we love
their afters

suppose the shape of whom
but not the box
she comes in

suppose the shape
and not the wind
that blows such

sweet cloth
against the evident
something
that resists

suppose we are tired
of resisting
that resistance

suppose a young horse
a pale rose

suppose a look
is enough and all

and all the rest
molecular babble
gates of hell
and hard to hold

still it was a horse
enough to stay
stand for
everything it is
so long and still

like a flag
flapping in a crowded sky.

WHIPPOORWILLS

Whippoorwill it's been so long
your alphabet is silent in my wood
the way florists set pale freesias
among scarlet roses to
scatter daylight's texture in the destined room
where such arrangements come
I haven't heard your voice in sixty years.

23 November 2003

LICHTENBERG

Lichtenberg talks about a town
where every person has red hair.
I wonder why he thought to mention it.
What is there to say about the actual?
A town where things continue as they are
till someone changes. A town
under the sky until the sky forgets.

23 November 2003

NARROWSBURGH, ON THE DELAWARE

It must be the water
that makes me remember,
we spent summer there
many a year until I thought
this land too was mine,
we pat our whisky dry
we wash our cigarettes
growing remorselessly
towards the perversion
called adulthood
of which the gospels warn us
time after time, never grow up
never stop feeling
the pain that made you born
and stays you young.

23 November 2003

The certainties
nearby

a fish aflame
or felt over head

cold sunlight
a blue jay

24 XI 03

WOLVES WAITING

I don't care what you say there are
or who you are to say so

they are wolves

and they are waiting for me
just out of sight

around the curve of path
as I walk along the hip of earth

every and any
path they're there

usually out of sight
but sometimes I see
the yellow of their eyes

wolves have such calculating eyes
the bronze blade
we call intelligence

a wolf.

24 November 2003

BORDERLAND

And then who came
and why won't down to sea
or went or done or dawn
or see I couldn't hear
what I heard could you

but you were sleeping
and all the beauty
came out of the tree
and stood around me
how could I share that

am I am officer of dream
with a night key
and you were sleeping
what could I do to the door
but endure the morning

woman after woman as it
came to be to me
all of them made of light
against light
shadow sisters

and I wrote down
the order of their passage
using no smarter names
for what I saw but
one two three and onward

but each number
really was a name
a picture inked in gold
on a dark ground
and what each showed

was one piece of the law
the world is a sleeping woman
who lets us know
only the morning only the evening
she threw the key away

in the sea or swallowed it
so I didn't know
whether to go deeper in
her to find it or out
through the sea and down the sky

to where it fell
and bring it back to you
before you wake
but I was late and wrong
left handed and

by the time I stumbled home
empty pocketed
you had awakened
and watched me come in
dark against the doorway

and you said here it is.

25 November 2003

semiotic is like semitic

said the dream
and we pushed inside it
yes, the wings, the hard dusty wings
of buzzards, desert buzzards,
swept hard over our faces

I crawled with you
up the red rock, or was it only sunset
spoke that color
into the hard fact

my knees hurt, I must be praying,

semitic, comes from Sem or Shem, the son of Noah,

and shem in Hebrew means, name, ha-Shem is The Name,
the name of the one who has no other
name, the one we call

a name is what we call someone who stands nearby

in space or in the field of mind,

a name's a kind of nomad thing
that's always looking for its meaning,

the man, the woman, the clean fox in her burrow
preening her tail, the shadow

of the vultures passing, compassion birds

who vanish the dead meat.

Semiotic, of the science that understands
the need to call out, and the soft shaping
inside of the mouth that calls,

science of calling
things by names
and names by other names
until we know,

science of knowing what we don't know

I have a book in which is written
the names of every thing,

shemiotic, shame
of having only my own name.

25 November 2003