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COSMOLOGISTS

Exhibit orgiastic responses
inside a small box
just big enough for these fingers
and two dice, fiddle
till some number amounts.

That must be it.

Stars are made of such integers
also, dollar bills, chromosomes,

everything you lost at puberty
is made of all the rest

the unanalyzed touch.

A bunch of ducks on the autumn pond.

19 December 2003

Now we need ink

Now who will write us
in Yiddish letters
so the birds can read
and bring us help & counsel
shadow by shadow?

The snow is deep,
sunlight rolls along it
an apple in candlelight
you have to give away
these things are not for you
the beauty is someone else's

if only the words came
with their own ink
the way branches write shadows on the snow
but how long would they last
and who would speak them
after the dark lost its way?

so many birds, it is a question
of listening to us, the way they go away
every night and discuss what we said
and tell us the result in our dreams
when everything gets erased by sunlight
and they only are left to remind us.

19 December 2003

ENTROPY

attracts devious customers
because it's something for nothing
is getting to the end of the chapter
without actually reading it
it's an escalator in a department store
up crosses down and the baluster belt
keeps running forever, you rest
your soft hand on its quivering stillness
it rides up with you, your hand so soft
from the emollient creams in the testers
down on the counters you rise from
into the autumn clothes and truly
it is time to pick out your xmas cards.
Truly the second coming is at hand.
Truly your skin is as close as I've ever come
to what I suppose the whole megillah means.

20 December 2003

THE NATURE

This rope is shorter
than the ground is far,
this glass is water
and water is nothing
but closeness, water
is always coming towards
and being close,
you carry it
among the tables
looking for wood.
All these relations
are simple, evidence
of how easy it could be
a chair, a cow
leaning on a fence
a moon leaning on the sky
the sky slumped over the earth
the earth sprawled out
beneath you. Beneath me.
Distanceless we dwell.

20 December 2003

WAX

The lost child remembers me
for I too am disinherited
from my horoscope
a blur of feeling in an empty sky

the *influence*, I know my hands
barely, and what they hold,
my animal shyness
and your mouth

leaving the word
ringing in its space
tongue of a bell
spilling a meaning

lingers only as an echo does
fragmentary mysterious diminishing
and then you kiss again
or even speak

or lie beside me
quiet as a mirror
and I doubt the lake
rowboat and setting sun

the mother on the jetty
reading real estate ads
this water is lost in the occasion
one breath at a time

the miracle unfolds throughout the store
things have shape
and the blue eye sees again
spilling the majolica candelabrum

and the wax wrote along the tablecloth
characters that looked like old Phoenician
Hebrew before Hanukkah, a sparrow
tosses down such shadows on the snow

yet everyone at dinner could pronounce
the word written on the linen
each in her own language
comfortable as seals fit the water

ply the green opacity round the ferry snout
easing through the lower bay
the sound fitted in the air
filling one thing with another

and some of us were crying now
at the wax word spoken
so loud or so delicately
but in every case deliberately

most of all the pale Hungarian
so angry at the silence broken
though she was guilty as the rest of us
a dinner party's like a petri dish

embalmed in sudden meanings
but nourished by what stifles us
she couldn't lift the napkin from her lap
he couldn't shift his salad fork

out from the shadow of his soup plate
hating the way things look when we can't move
I want to be a picture on your wall
she thought, and the Irish girl

tried to mean even less than that
just water in crystal, just egg on china
just lipstick left on silver, just a candle
spilled its wax but still on fire

casting a queasy light on people she doesn't love
once there was wine
once the florist's uncle played the mandolin
once wax took on any shape proposed

and didn't chatter on the linen cloth
as if everything had something to tell us
no, we always keep talking
but I'll never really tell you what I'm thinking

you of all people I have to trust
to know the intricate simplicity of what I want
the word I try in every other way to tell you
of all people, estranged from all

these mutual disciples, giddy friends
supposing the shadow of the opening door
is their Master suddenly present
and all their tipping feeds a lost Elijah

at some other feast, no one is coming
no one is at the door,
you are the door,
you sit quietly as wood

turning always in upon yourself
you let the shadow in
and it too flickers on the table cloth
as if it also knew how to touch your skin

scripting the faltering discourse of afterwards,
the insolent desserts, and crows
are calling at the back of my mind
and my eyes dazzle at the candle flame

could it actually be light?
and now the time comes to tell our fortunes
and the pale Hungarian is best at that,
one will be reborn as a weaver

one will live two hundred years and deal in jade
one will have a car crash and survive
but give off loving women, one will learn
an abstruse mathematics but refuse to teach

one will walk the cliffs of Donegal but never
find it — what? — it doesn't say
and one will come home late and find an old friend
waiting in the shadows, who knows what will be said?

after that she couldn't read the flicker any more
so we discussed séances and Victorian iron work
until the ice cream melted, how many
at this table believe in God she asked

and everybody groaned or giggled, throats
were cleared, but nobody said anything,
silence is a sort of survey too, my fingertips
studied my other fingertips and closed my eyes

but I kept hearing the things you wouldn't say.

21 December 2003

GAZE

Staring at the moon —
can it tell me
what I need to know?

The moon is a string
around my finger
reminding me

I don't know what,
I try to remember
whose fingers tied it there

and when and why
and all I see is moon.
Your skin,

all the strings.
Who tied the knot,
who breathed on it.

22 December 2003

Winter Solstice

PORTRAIT D'UNE FEMME

Bending forward
over the forget
she forgot the common
taste, the copper
birthright, the image
he had to sustain
of her, of how
she was a sacred
glyph carved into air,
each curve a signifier
each line
a new religion.

For she was in
the middle of instead,
of else, of this
itself unspeakable
she was, a point
without extension
a warm unknowing.

23 December 2003

[Dream at waking]

Long Island bus ride arrival after hours so long we'd been riding and now the grey skyscrapers of Riverhead against ocean sky but we weren't in that city itself but outskirts of, Xerox City the low seedy neighborhood where the driver said suited businessmen and novelists got off to look for work, and we had to get off too because the bus was starting back to New York meaning the real city a hundred miles west we got down with all our bags and shoes so many shoes and no clue to why we were there or what we sought or how we'd get to the end of the island where it was, whatever it was, dreams are such bad novels anyhow, who could ever read it to the end, and what do shoes mean in a dream, so many shoes?

23 December 2003

DES ADIEUX

I'd be as comfortable
if we never spoke again.
If comfort
were a way to be,
if never
were a condition
within our reach.
But things talk us
into play, and the endless
lugubrious one-sided
conversation changes
only its anxieties.

23 December 2003

A SAIL

A sail is a triangle
or a square
the wind is caught

by sheer geometry
but we must consent
to what we will

or it will not take us
to where the world
ends, blue ice,

shadow of air.

23 December 2003

THE SONATA OF BIBER

“Be it done to me according to thy word”

I hear this and think of her saying so
all the things that spill out of these words

and somehow I’m on the rue de Seine in rain
at evening twilight in front of Mulot’s
tasting the window and seeing women inside

they’re packing little boxes of pastry
and I wonder where the crucifixion is
the intersection of every road with every other

I feel their bodies move inside my own
a glass world, all lights and texture and guesses,
first happy mystery of the Rosary.

23 December 2003

A SMALL DIAMOND RING

What are the destinations we expect
so fervent from the snow walk
bird bone seed hull twisted wire
around a skull of feeding suet
I am on the side of the other
whenever she comes close or even
waves to me from her passing Lexus
animated by her broken heart
so many times and still she strives
to keep the normal chores alive
husband income house and dog

pasteurized accountancy
no one gets sick of money
because it feels like virtue coming in
virtue sitting on a heap of it
and virtue spending it for self
rewarding one for all one's efforts
to acquire the means to proffer
such circular compensations
I work to treat myself for working

is it tax time yet, that nickel Tuesday
that breaks the car and drowns the fish?
walk there like a conqueror
because you're the only one on camera
and you're the only one who'll ever see
the tender lunacies of what we want
projected on the momentary actual