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UMBRELLA

The wind lifts the green
umbrella off the patio
holds it just over my head
my hand can on the second
try reach the stem and coax it down
fold it till calm weather.
A feeling in its moment

only. But bring the feeling to
evident origin

as if your fingers were your toes
and walked in heaven

the distortion of being
somebody
on the road
a long line looped around the heart

pull tight, the Russian
anger of loving you
a little wind
looking into those clear eyes
how can they hate me so much

another movie
matinee the opposite of morning
wake this life of mine

I began when I came out of the theater
onto Fulton Street one hot afternoon
but unknown to me the exit itself
and the street and the lazy summer people
were all part of the movie, and this
is still the movie and

a work of art once begun is never ended.

They all go on. They all go on
forever,

the projector seldom falters, the light
is true
ever after

as you turn into you
ceaselessly and the role of I am
constantly recast
a shimmer of happenstance
while the plot idles in the background
a car goes somewhere with people in it
a woman takes off her dress and cries

I see the ocean every now and then
between the heads of those I love
remind me I never left home
and all the while I thought I was reading a book
then writing one
but it was just the movie
anonymous as rain

once you're in it you're in it
the carpeted staircase the candy stand the tile in the bathroom
the girls laughing by the water fountain
the exit door that smashes open full of light
the street the train the house the sky
the mother the father the wife the little cat
all part of the same admission the same
incoherent masterpiece of love.

5 July 2002

NAMES LEFT OVER FROM THE OPERATION

But if I calculate the transformations
with the evidence submitted, lipid shimmer,
bake a cookie, or will a flag
drape over a cloud (a cloud could)
and the sun itself be some gaudy patriot?
Who is Elemer, who is Hopson,
who is Father Measles, who is Loeb?
Name your opera, pardner, we've got
to pour the last music into the desert
eager as a dumb dog, nothing
waits forever. Bach no more
my pretty little one, my brass
coal scuttle my half-Brit valentine.
Amazed shopkeepers chop water
with their practiced fingertips. Endure
like sun on grass, that's all.
An hour more to soak the bonsai
and give pleasure to the alien inspectors
who hover in their Oldsmobiles aloft
---- they pay us to survive ---- tell me,
my sheikh, how long is your experiment?
Aren't we battered enough by being?
Does there have to be barter too, my words
for your music, all that slick exchanging?
I just wanted to be fire in your water,
I just wanted to be the spell I cast on you
so that I can finally enjoy myself. Read

the menu. Follow the maitre d' down
through the pimlico of bolting diners
into the serene entitlement of soup.
You pay for crap like this. All right, I'll pay,
my heart for that hip, sleek thief,
imponderable animal are you? Home yet?
Is the river dry? The sun knows how to rain
but could the skin receive (cloud could)
damp messages from earlier operas?
Iris, L'Oracolo, Peter Ibbetson. Cloud?
Even home is too far from home.
Waring Blender. Electro-Lux. Arcadia.
When I was on the verge of puberty
someone I was was on the verge of dying
now I have inherited his books his ways
his fluent explanations. They ring the churchbell
each time a bachelor tells a lie,
count the hours then you'll know
how far the truth still has to go
to answer each tree leaf individually
like the pope distributing communion
the whole forest stirs around the simple hand.
House. Live in my hands. When complex
individuals bake cookies and the sky
is a kind of silent blue, the clouds are anxious
and edgy philosophers discuss identity.
This means the movie turns and talks about the eye.
This means you, unspeakably myself
I caress your momentary absences all over.

5 July 2002

NAUTICAL LANGUAGE

Not to desire her aloft
the strangely pilgrim
smack on the broad sea
by the shape you know her

count the parts the stems the veils
what kind of ship
sails up a word

pilgrim port or man of war
device on the mainsail
arrogantly unknown.

For you she dared the portolan's
inscrutable roses, the unlogged
certainties of reef and cliff
like a priest offering an animal

something like blood drips down the hull.

Q. How does a ship sail?

A. By the puff or suck of its own breath.

When you touch yourself you're at the middle,
it ploughs the sea of its own blood
and then the ship comes in
gulls shattering the sky above it

acts of contrition and the land quakes
a ship shaped like a sigh
falls from the high wave
down into your littlest harbor
a little bit after the middle of the day.
A holiday. The volcano
smokes prettily up beyond the glacier
and parliament adjourns with a prayer.

6 July 2002

A TREATISE ON FREE WILL

Understood nothing of what I've seen
don't know how music comes
all my life they've milked from the air
green felt black rubber sleek CD

my religion is to be a microphone
love is a violation exclusively insertions
transgressions of a fugue the know-how
happens in your after head

music comes of what I've seen the dumb
felt details the green ink of the visible
to understand nothing how the tape felt
stretched around the tone the brave band
lost in the wilderness of listening

but still in seedy Roma the Holy
Spirit manages to keep, sleep, wake
inside another love inserted
a puff of white smoke over every chapel
transgress me for I am orifice alone
or On this tone I build my choice
the fakes of will shall not prevail against it
when all we are is choosing, the web
of circumstance stretched across a fact or two
 the stuff you measure and call
 by one word or another when all
 it means is one more feeling.

7 July 2002

LEARNING

Teacher, show me the stylus the cursor
the straightedge the abscissa the eraser.
Cut a mask of my face out of oak tag,
teacher, let me wear it instead of my face.

8 July 2002

THE ACT OF

Feeling the shape
flow down my fingers
into this thing
I do not know, can't
know till it says itself
under my hands,

how can such things be?
That the answer
lives in the one who
barely can speak
the question out
into the air

like some furtive friend
steals into my house
and picks up a guitar
then feels guilty
at touching
what is not hers
to touch and softly
sets it down
and even so
a sound invades
the air,
 a hollow
left inside hearing,
sweet scar of
something felt.

8 July 2002

WHILE

while the assassins are busy at our bus stops
while the honey trickles through the bear's muzzle fur
while the organist runs a finger round his collar
while the stone sits in the sun and no one waits
while the weekend guests wake up back in the city
while the cloud slips past the white pines
while two blue jays complain by the empty feeder
while the governor is gazing from safety at a forest fire
while the bookbinder thinks about learning to read
while a gutter in Jericho drips radiator coolant and cola
while pre-teens contemplate unendurable pangs of desire
while no one lives inside the clothes in the closet
the afternoon is quietly saying good bye to you forever.

8 July 2002

CONFESSION

I've never read the Rilke letters to a young poet. I think many years ago I started to read it, and then thought something like this: I want to be able to say these things, not receive such instructions. It was the arrogance of my young manhood, that wanted to stand in the place of the poet speaking, not the young poet. And so I think I have missed much wisdom and tenderness. That is the shame and sadness of it. But I took a stance, to be the one who spoke. And that has been a blessing and a way.

8 July 2002

THE ADOLESCENT

You asked me did I want to see your breasts
then you took me where there were fireflies
thousands of them more than I had ever seen
more than there are in the world
you took me outside the world
into a valley where a naked woman
was almost naked and you were she
and you were the only solid in the world
and I saw your eyes where fireflies
lit up the night they actually gave light
I saw the straw light of the standing corn
I saw the dark rims of your areolas
and for all these years my lips have tried
to shape the word that meant your breasts.

9 July 2002

THE QUIZ

The candidate sits at a table, hands palm down, comfortably apart on the table top. The questioner stands facing the candidate. Between them, at right angles to both, stands a large clock with a stopwatch feature.

The questions are asked in the same format: "Are you x or y?" The candidate is told to answer instantaneously, without thinking, fast as he can. The stopwatch times the answer, and the elapsed time is noted by the questioner. The slow answers will, of course, be the object of later review.

The questioner asks the questions quickly, clearly, each following as fast as possible on the heels of the last answer.

Are you:

beautiful or ugly

fat or thin

tall or short

happy or sad

rich or poor

effective or ineffective

active or passive

honest or dishonest

long or short

bright or dull

smart or dumb

learned or ignorant

helpful or unhelpful

lazy or industrious

hot or cold

sexy or unsexy

fast or slow

hot or cold

north or south

blue or green

red or yellow

nice or mean

brave or cowardly

flesh or bone

meat or fat

animal or vegetable

water or fire

sky or earth

sea or shore

light or dark

waking or sleeping

friendly or unfriendly

out or in

back or front

...

(note composed 9 July 2002)

If this were the shape of what it was going to be
And the shape changed, then the going
Was going to become a different becoming
Or coming to be in the place where the shape was made
Discovering there was nothing but coming
And after that no shape except becoming
And no making at all not even anything not even
The shadow of a shape but only a shaping
Shaping someone who perceives a shape
Only a person in short who shadows a becoming
By coming through the change and being.

9 July 2002

AN INSCRIPTION

But when there is too much to remember
is a turbine a calendar? *Any named
thing is nostalgia*

 tell me a story
listen to what happens and then say it
is that a rule, a pallid audience,
the fan whirling overhead, the swordsman
asleep at the emir's portal?

Bonsai, or your new boots
in that neighborhood of summer
where everything seems far away
I still believe in angels I love you
still these avowals prove me un peu passé
a little bit part of the old problem

in Cyrillic characters face to the wall
the sin and its forgiveness wrapped so tight
together marbled fat in crimson meat
I think it will rain you think it's Botticelli
two stepladders stand side by side
of different altitudes to different heavens lead

because I listened to the book inside my mouth
when I say I you have no right to think it's me.

9 July 2002

DON'T HOLD ME TO IT JUST HOLD ME

I haven't heard the subway in ages
so it's time to walk downstairs again
and see where all these tunnels
have in mind,

 a tunnel is all going
and no choosing, all the choice
is done, the train makes noise
it's full of people reading books, swaying
attractively and clutching to sleek poles,
a dance in gravity, language is spoken
but not by me,

 my destination
(suddenly I have one) is incomprehensible
one stop is just like any other
walls floors columns benches stairs
stenches it is like summer
it is like going to the beach it's raining
when you climb up out of the station
how dare the ocean be so wet,

 weather
is an intolerable generalization
I'll keep all the promises I made I will I will
but don't look too closely at the keep
I was born in this city what more do you want?
A man making a promise is like
frying a fish that still in the ocean
or spreading the shadow of a bird
between two pieces of soft white bread
and calling it the day after tomorrow.

9 July 2002

DENIER

I scrape the brick dust off the brick
and send it to the chemist
Can you prove the shadow of a hawk
once fell across this wall?
If not, there are no birds, no cloud, no light.
And I have refuted the sky.

9 July 2002

IN THE CARDS

Men hammering, they know how
morning everybody hurries, inscribe my scroll
ROTA the girl says she's from the typist pool
she comes to run my head through her machine
to see what I will say ROTA when she breaks me
on her wheel ROTA the sequences of angel assistants
how she comes to help according to her place
in the dance her order in the structure TORA
she comes at the right moment in the sequence
the right moment is the TORA the sequence is TARO
we kneel down close together ORAT she prays with me
Almighty Causality, make this man up ORAT
she prays Wake him to see how days
follow his fingers and night is made of eyes
Teach him to count his cards TARO as they fall
and understand the empty pattern TORA they tell.
The girl from the rota is praying up my sleeve
our bodies are somehow stuck together
her fingers press the necessary keys the message spills,
she is more a part TORA of me than I am of myself.
Men hammering is this girl typing ORAT my words
pour out of her body, without her TARO
I would have nothing to tell TORA but with her TORA
everything, watching my mind unpack itself
in her lips like milk TARO like the cards spilled on the floor
telling all of my futures TORA telling me listen
while she prays ORAT in me, she prays to me
I pray to her, all it takes is TORA is one sky
the clouds ratcheting smoothly up through the machine.

10 July 2002