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CEPPO

log left in trees:
why don't they bury us
where we fall
so we lie where we live

Treatise
against cemeteries

let the dead
stay among us
whispering palpably
sharing the confusions of their state

their chemical destinies.

What would it be if Amy Goldin talked in me?
Would it be different from my usual palaver?

everything we know how to say
came our way from the ones before us

the ancient bodies whose wounds we are.

Everything is all we know at any minute
is a said word, an overheard mistake.

Fill the pen fast
the world is full of news.

16 August 2002

THE UNIVERSAL FUNCTION

I thought it was Mahler
but it was sleep

the way you can't stop
talking about the weather

when you get down to it
that's all there is.

17 August 2002

TOONS

I don't want to live in a cartoon.
And that's why dogs make me uneasy
even when they don't scare me to death.
A dog is a toon, half flesh and half
a wicked fancy of entitlement.

17 August 2002

MAHLER'S SIXTH SYMPHONY

I don't want to live in an abstraction
any more. Any more than you do.

I want the scum of my actual life
frictional and thick. I will walk on glass
and sleep in shingle. Romance again,

intricate night music, horseradish
in whipped cream, I send you home
for breakfast. We risk so much for one another.
That is what music means.

17 August 2002

MENSCHENHERZ

you have to come with me.

There is a silence you have to light up
with your easy gossip, loving and interpreting
all the customers in my café. The smoke
of barely legal cigarettes hangs across the air
and people are afraid to listen to their own
conversations. Hard to be with one's own kind.
Help me. Make them talk to one another,
make them settle their hips and elbows
comfortably to for endless palavering.
But nobody is looking, talking, feeling.
Menschenherz, I have a box of seashells,
I breathe softly in them, hold them to my ears,
the words I hear are the words I spoke,
how can I live with that kind of news?
Make them talk again in my stunned café.

17 August 2002

AN ARIA FROM *FAUST*

The sexiest move is interpretation.
No one can resist that sly penetration.
You say more than you know
and know more than there is.

Desire is a penknife and a loupe
a little piece of silk thread and a pin
and an old pencil for me to write down
measurements I'd do better to forget

but this is all I have, this dull
song of understanding you.
It bores and bothers you, but at the end
you belong to everything I said.

17 August 2002

LOSING

It is a dignity, a loss
at least, and people always
look serious at that.

A bear day downtown,
parcel left in the taxi
you talk too much

to random people
you lose things all the time
the token rolls on the tracks

but not tragedy, not yet.

17 August 2002

THE HAP OF BIRTHDAY

Whose birthday?

Without you

what would I be?

A family of questions

who died before the answer,

that ruined temple

you see the sunset through,

broken columns, a door

open on nowhere,

which one of us

got born today?

There is a country

where one day every year

no one gets born.

And that day is called

Everybody's Birthday.

Gifts are exchanged,

promises made, love slaps

tendered, drunkenness

endured.

But here

we have to shout to overhear

how wonderful you

happen to the day.

17 August 2002

READING *THE DAWN IN BRITAIN*

haunted by the delicate dissonance
between Doughty's Victorian verse
and the slip of Xeroxed pages
through my fingers. What time is it,
time of meter, time of tech,
the fall of language keeps me reading,
elbows on the table, each page
as if a letter from someone
I never knew but here it is. Reading
is being a child on the prowl
for all I'll ever need
and some of it is here
in the short breaths built
up in endless lines, this old asthmatic god
reciting the world, commas
strewn through like September leaves.

17 August 2002

NIGHT STORIES

1.

How little we really knew about him
when he came. Breath to do something
bigger he seemed to have. But where'
was his heart, hard to say. So some
never trusted. Worry about where
he came from, or what he thought
on the pillow at night, that's what
you really need to know about a man.
We knew nothing about his dreams.

2.

Everybody has a dream world of their own
usually it's ok to leave people alone in theirs.
But some people, he was one, seemed to have
too much breath just for ordinary talk.
His stories might be really dangerous to us
if we didn't know, and we didn't. You know
what I mean, most people, it doesn't matter
what they're thinking, they'll never do it.
But some people, you see, so what we really
need to know is what people think about
when they're really alone, and tired,
and in the dark, just on the brink of sleep
or waking a little and walking barefoot
down the hall, the staircase in the dark.

18 August 2002

POLARIS

Clarity breaks.
Spirit is a thing
also, waits
for matter
at a mountain pass

but will we gather
in time
for that meeting

and what will we
have to do
with matter?

Won't the mountain
be enough
without me?

I was afraid to ask you
as I passed by
but you left your face
written in my mind
I look at you still

the ground rises
towards a terrible
simplicity
I look into your eyes.

18 August 2002

UNTIME

I woke up before the day was ready
people were on their way to get
churches ready for other people
a scorcher it will be today a look
of fever in the trees am I the one
you thought I dreamed last night
there is something else wanting to be me.

18 August 2002

GNOMIKA

To know the future doesn't mean to say it.

To say the future doesn't mean to know it.

To say nothing of what's to come

doesn't keep it away though

a word is a dog that keeps the thing at bay.

To specify tomorrow might close a certain door.

There are rules, alas there are rules.

Things depend,

like a heavy amber chain around your neck.

The mind is perpendicular.

18 August 2002

A PRAYER TO THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

I want to know the words I never use.
Tell me some words I never say
so I can know the things I do not know
the cities I forget to visit. Index me.
Let me visit the wells of my neglect.
And then explain what I really mean
by the words I keep saying all the time.

18 August 2002

ZAOTHRA

to offer and be the one who offers

to call a divinity

to write

signs, runes

to repent

to be the one who is supposed to repent

repent means think again

or think it through

hard or stand in awe

of what one has done or not done

to be afraid

of one who is afraid

to protect

protect fear

fear is the feeling that holds upright

protect fear from being swept away

bright things, by bright things

to shine or to give light

a word

fire in a chalice

make a grave mound

heal a mountain

healthy evil

wise shame

to turn religion towards us

to make a positive

contract with what seems

instead of repent give something to someone
instead of fear help someone make something
instead of a mountain walk over to a stranger and make him or her happy
anybody can do the least of these

a new prophet there is no word
for prophet in this language

a language is a religion

the language people speak is what they really believe

isn't it.

18 August 2002

THE ATMOSPHERE OF EARTH

Sometimes I think everything I have ever written was written with you in mind, the grace of you reading me, the grace of you taking it all in, understanding it, using it, and going beyond.

I certainly would not be the first one who thought: one writes to get beyond oneself. One writes to say what one doesn't know. I write what I don't know, so you will know it. I write what is the case with me, the words that flee like foxes and hares from the forest fire of my feelings, so that you in safety may know what set the brand among my branches.

If you know it, then it is known. If it is known, then I am remembered inside your breath. We can't live by our own breath alone, only in the breath of another.

19 August 2002

LUCK

Gamblers know a lot about the soul.
The underwear part, the never shower
while you're lucky part, the words
you're not supposed to say. Don't let
that evil image cross your mind.
The soul is made of stuff like that.
I wonder what the priests make
of this soul, the one that loves
bright colors and the smell of yesterday
when you won big and everything was good.
There must be priests who gamble.
There must be a soul like that in me
because just now I picked a sprig
of windblown leaves all withered
off my table and tossed it god knows
where, and immediately I knew
I had done wrong, scorned a sign,
an emissary from the holy everything
that of all the world picked me to visit
and I have failed the encounter
one more time. What have I done
and what will Luck do with me,
that quick impatient friend? Won't I
ever learn? Will she leave before
the music stops? And will I have
the nerve to follow wherever she goes?

19 August 2002

QUESTIONNAIRE

How close do I have to be to far
to be a farmer?

Or given
all the cabbages, is this tree,
hemlock, fruitless, dark
nearer to me than a mother.
are you?

I want you so much
and there's no border to my wanting
only the terrible
borders of me.

We live
in each other's silky pockets,
we give up oil for Lent
when we are Greeks but all night
we are Jews along our pillows

won't you?

Doesn't it want me
in you too? Aren't all
our differences the same?

19 August 2002

SACRAMENT

Compose yourself darling
the night's asleep
and any touch
might be your mother,

I have a little silver plate that says
he made the fruit he made the vine
at tipsy midnight drink the words with me

19 August 2002

PRISON FIRE

what's caught
between us

we are the walls
in which it yearns

for a prairie
clouds on the mountain

and a hawk
it hears

whistling in your chest.
Only when we're very

close can that fire
squeezed out from

the space between us
(there is no

space between us)
leap to be

and be a beacon
to our understanding

the nameless

light of us

among all the too many

stars with names.

19 August 2002