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THE DEVOTED

Now open this, right here.
Arriviste manners, mine,
first thing in your morning.
I was a man, you were a time.

Of day this much is said:
translate anew
some text well known
so measure yourself
against other servants

not the master.
O who is the first
to answer
when the wind calls?

Silver and gold.
The patent luster of aluminum
tucked round a turkey carcass
sarcophagused in the fridge,

I am a sign along your road
you paused to study me
and having read
you set fire to the stalk
on which I rose

you and me, a roadside conflagration
no other travelers troubled to put out

how long can ragweed burn
through all our autumns together
a strange word meaning a sacrificial lamb
as dazzled Abraham about to kill his son
Γ,;,Π, by Sokurov, old (not so old)
Lenin feeble, weakened by being cared for,
rides out in his big car.
Lenin is not at the wheel,
the ship careens across the channel
brings me to The Harbor
and after two thousand years I'm back in Gaul

and were you waiting on the autobus? no.
in Québec? no. along the fawn
sofa of my living room
the infinitesimals chase us home.

We are the famous zero
all your calculus approaches,
we are the vanishings the girl
lighting a votive candle at Good Shepherd
a tall devout bougie at Saint-Sulpice,
Jewess, my heart hungers for your certainties,
kabbalah alas the only math I understand

But if you don't know that you don't know this.

Cantinflas the Mexican remember him
or Glenda Farrell much to be desired
or the heartbeat of a dying man, mine,

sphygmomanometer, act of contrition,
I kneel inside you pressed to your forgiving knee
the grey cloud passes then the blue permanence
looks to be passing too and it's the big white fellow
who zeuses it up there now, more cloud
scuds fast, so close to the mountain ridge
my pen can hardly keep pace with its conversation
the running title above my life the Russian under
because all of you come from the East, the steppe
the Kalmuk wilderness and you the green
eyed peddler's daughter and you the Rabbi's son
so much entanglement in cloud and shadow.

Only then did he realize the sun had risen
so rose from his book which he left reverently open
a purple ribbon draped to mark the passage
where the god names recited themselves
inside the tents of sleeping nomads
and women listened, hide the words
from passing spirits who have no need to know.
Alarm clocks minuited through the house downstairs,
the landlord's daughter snuggled under down.

5 September 2002

McKinley Hollow

KEEPING NUMBERS STRAIGHT

we need a post office
where numbers
are sent to their words

a man's number
could there be such a thing as an accident
of course of course not
spiraea in spring
drawbridge on Balsam creek
a girl singing in Hindi
behind my left ear

On the dining room wall
the outline of a tree
something India
neem or fig
a throw of shadow
to mark the room

to give a number to the thing you see

fragrant hair of course of course not
coconut oil
missionaries to the Christians we
fold our hands
cupping loose between our palms
the balsam smells of softwood trees
the pine lorn lost mine hemlock shade

that's our number they're repeating on tv
call us and get your gospel
we have your heart between our hopes

call me
I am a number
call me
I am yours
call me call me
I am god

a little brown bat flutters by the porch light
by the arbor vitae by the cypress

so many trees
which one really is the tree of life

call me
I am god
I am the number left
when all your calculating's done

white pebbles
to shift around with your toes
count me
into a curve
count me
and suddenly a star over the mountain

this star has two eyes

it comes for me

how much it moves
without changing its position

hlbq
what is it doing?
does a star dance

it's dancing as its place
a warrior dances so
or an angel
"an angel has only one mission
if it had two missions it would be two angels"

it's dancing
in its place
dying
of our unfulfilled desires

these lights
of one thing
hurrying
to know me

I am the ambassador of being gone
near me
Bedouin on the warpath
move through the lower sky

all afternoon I counted trees until I woke.

5 September 2002, Oliverea

ALEPH

Learning to listen
is an alphabet

elven fire
the people
here before people

still here
talk to me in the woods

you
city to hide from.

5 September 2002

McKinley Hollow

McKINLEY HOLLOW

Hill and hollow
the fall of place

a witticism
dropped from heaven
we puzzle to understand

what the simplest
place actually is

how much up and how much down
essentialism of locus

mountain mountain

even the smallest you
holds the secret

tell me

the scary story
not just because big
but apart from me

there is nothing further than a mountain

how can something so far from us be here?

right overhead
and the hollow
is part of it
a solid shadow of it
a word of it
closer to the ear

to walk up the hollow is to be on the mountain
to climb the mountain though, up there, high
listening to the Commandments rattle down from heaven
and scratch your virgin slates
up there you're not on the mountain anymore
because a mountain has to be above you

so you're only on a mountain when you're under it
otherwise the sky

to climb a mountain
means to try to find the other mountain hidden in the sky

and if you're lucky you come down with empty slates.

6 September 2002
Balsam Mountain

THE POSTURE OF WRITING

The posture of writing
writes

as the sage is bent low
head held between the knees
tasting the circumcision of the word

the tongue hold low is holy

constrain the blood
imagine the blood flow ceasing
one instant is eternity
then flows again and time
renews its journey in me

what would the sage remember from that pause

if number is the word

posture of the word

So the body is to assume the shape of the letters
one by one,
the twenty-two degrees of initiation
and in each letter
the body must dwell a while and speak

because the letters came before the words
and words came before things
and things came before the need to speak

what is a letter
a letter is a posture of the real
one of the limited set
of postures the living body can assume
to stand between the earth and the sun
or sometimes moon

as we live through the letters
all the love yous and farewells
speak themselves lucidly at the right time
deep inside this starry system

everything suffers and nothing's wrong.

Ape the letters,
be them
carve the air with your body till
space looks like a wall
and your body is a word graven in the wall

2.

But there is a posture in which
writing must be done

but being your body
in the shape of a letter
is not enough.

you have to say the word
out loud, a lot,
until somebody hears you
and knows what you're saying

this can take a long time.

Saying the word
means being every word
the letter inhabits

a long time later (if time
is still an issue) you
have to stop being the letter
and start doing what the letter does

what the letter tells.

So if you're a D you have to open up the door and let something in or out or through.

If you're an L you have to jab
cattle and make them move or else you must play a harp
and follow oxen while they trample grain
teaching everybody
why you do what you do
clearing a path through virgin prairie

writing the body's act

6 September 2002, Balsam Mountain

Late and a partner

whips the cloud white

animate

against the ferry slip

the lute of waters

strummed by ear

memoria

wood walls give and heave

the green weed sluiced down by every wave

We make the waves.

I come to the city and mean everything,

I come back to the starting place,

across the Cunard straits the heights of Brooklyn

were the real Vinland

our terminal moraine drenched with tomatoes with wine

if I only dared to let myself remember.

6 September 2002

Oliveria

CAUSES

Spin the cell phone
the one it points to
makes a call
to a number supplied
by the player at the left.
Proposes marriage
to the one who answers.
(Sponsa / responsa
a spouse is one who answers)

This procedure stymies
ordinary angels. If no one
answers you die an old maid.

Though this game has been played
all over the world for thousands of years
no one has ever been married. Ever.
But who know who else
lies trembling in the dark.

7 September 2002

CRIMSON

Something phonetic
liberal at parting
like the weather you remember
not the one out
side your wayward ears

broken inside is all the way it really is

so you heard
what she was saying
and you went on walking anyhow
then turned around only a furlong higher
and hurried back calling her name

her name was red in the morning
and you called it more than once
and you called it loud
until the sound of your calling was a kind of answer

7 September 2002

THE PROPERTY OF TOUCH

Something cold around the heart today
he thought he had looked at beauty all his life
and here was this sea shell on the window sill
breathtakingly he said sumptuous the agent
never concealing her angelic character
“the trace we force upon the air” he said

so he studied her immaculate departures
who bothers to listen to linguistics
it only tells you what you already don't know you know
the rule is rubber anyhow to press Vaseline
against the snug exceptions and force each
to reveal new meaty instances of pleasure
he thought were all hidden in next week

now can't wait to see you again and seeing
is what he means: you are the walking
glyptotheque, the statue reaches his arms
the admirable Person he misses so much
so it's really not all about just looking is it
it's not a museum it's a trench in warfare
a touch in presence, animated by the visual
trace, so that he knows it's your muscle
say and not somebody else's.

Is it the propriety
of touch?

Or understand the urbane river
well-disciplined by bluestone esplanades
down which a cat might step alarming none
yet a new day has certainly begun
with all it drags with it from Persia and from Sind
news of blue rebels who will never give up.

He will never stop wanting whatever it is
he thinks is you. No wonder
people linger in the caress of some recollected shape.

7 September 2002

AVOWAL

I want to tell you something nude
something the bird forgot to say and the lake
forgot to hear, something I just made up,
a morning thing, frail and provisional,
when the only sounds I hear
are the pen scraping lined paper
(*writan* meant scratch once) and a car
moving north along the highway
Doppler effect, fear of separation
fear of losing you the way a sound
gets lost into the morning
and not even an echo is left.
So if I remember what a word means
always will it be you?

8 September 2002

AUSTRIA

The trouble is my mind is so fucking Viennese
always sentimental cruel always
wanting something new. Kitsch and innovation.
They belong together. A sneaky caress
that discovers an unknown element in your lap.

8 September 2002

THE CHILDREN

Finding the moment
when the light decides
eat a tree

 touch an eel
deep down in memory

voltage
 things light up
inside

 in our universe
the fruits hang down
that grow on a tree
that stands in another

we eat what they grow
some days
afraid the bill will come
what then

how will we pay for being?

8 September 2002