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AS IF THE PRIMAL

This is the beginning
but is this really this,

is it the prairie
we meant to wander,
lovers from Europa
fondling the sunsets
in each other

so much further away
than any fire
we had ever seen

only the heart
was so far

and could you find me
by its glare
when I lost you
in the herds of deer and wapiti

all the blue shadows
falling down the rocks?

17 September 2002
(from much earlier)

TYPEWRITER

I'm not sure
I actually know what I'm doing
only I have this machine
under my hands

is it me?

am I the man
you dreamed of on your birthday
as midnight was productive of the day
a man giving you, giving you birth

you gave me the machine
you found it in the street
an Italian band was jogging by
hammering out Rossini

o the bad queen we both adored
o again and again we lay down our lives for love

but of all this
is only what the machine tells me
only the truth
the world knows
but who is the world?
we pay attention only to what knows how to talk

outside the window a tree is full of gaps
a woodpecker drilled them,

every substance
is veined with something someone wants
someone will kill to get
or we will lay our lives down
for just such holes
to fill them, to have them filed

forgive my honest Persian,
the machine makes me work like a rose.

17 September 2002

THE TRACK

Will I do what the calendar tells me or
there are friends hidden in vital places
disguised as viruses or some as motormen
strangely abandoning their locomotives.
Absent evidence (as Brahmins say)
we must conclude I lie
even when I mean to tell the truth
relative as I am of ancient kings
as we all are I have no single doubt.
though I despair a lot, having only
myself as a commodity, i.e.,
I see myself only when I give myself
to you. A self is a system of transactions.
To others just a lawnmower bothering
a sleepy Sabbath, damp today
and autumn soon, do you know
how much habit lives in wanting?
What does want itself want, and who
or whom? You won't find answers here,
muchacha, for I have risen from a dream
of sharing and walk up the hill in mist —
I see me doing this just as clear
as if I were there. But I'm here,
dark houses under chestnut trees, animals
resigned to winter. Now that I bother
looking I see the mist comes out of the ground.

18 September 2002

AGAPE

Blundering into the ruined chapel find altar intact.

Something moves inside it or behind it.

The point is, architecture is the only art,
the rest are graces clustered round the skin
to make us sing inside what we inhabit

Of course the catacombs, of course basilica,
stadium, the stick upright in sand, that's all,
architecture is whatever casts a shadow

and we live in it. That's all we need, that
and silent mornings outside the asylum
patients roaring to their quiet god.

18 September 2002

Every name
is a confession.

18 IX 02

ISLAND

White birds. Everywhere.
Once on the north they
thronged the road
we inched through them
dense as chickens white as gulls
tall as geese but none of these.
Nobody knew their name
nobody ever admitted they'd
even ever seen them, they must be
so common they're invisible,
nameless as light is
streaming through the wet forest.

When I go back I'll learn
their names or learn that only
I ever got to see those birds.
Empty roads by Kaneohe Bay.

19 September 2002

KING

I needed to know none of that
the angry newspapers the loving messages
the moods of mine

my people
saying what they say. What they feel.

I though it was enough for me to see
the dew on the leaf, no need for flowers.
bible, commentary, truth.

If this
is here, everything's in place.

How feeble
to be a king and have to reckon
on what my people think they feel
when I am pure feeling without thinking.
I reign truest when I close my eyes.

19 September 2002

What was I thinking before I started thinking?

19 IX 02

ZOO

A lovely word, one of the few
that made it from nickname to word.

Zoo. It even looks like Africa
where the real animals come from,

the important people, lions, elephants,
a snake a week long, a bird

who builds a house for other people.
Old stone wall, old iron fence,

children straggle through the gate of the word.

19 September 2002

*He contemplated and invented (set down a hint with a pencil or so)
in the morning, but compiled in the afternoon.*

— (Aubrey on Hobbes)

of all people I should be found like
who would have thought it,

Hobbes, like me, after noon
declined into prose

... 19 September 2002

Uncomfortable mind
caught between being

family to the world
or friend to one

intimacy the fault
too much discourse

the sleek Latinity of my desires
screws up its grammar

howls and habits.

20 September 2002

OUR USUAL ARGUMENT

Tell me what you're thinking.

Anthills. Sizes of our confusion.

Photographic circles.

I knew Ansel Adams once

I don't mean that I mean lenses, lens,

can I be one, can I be Valéry?

The algorithms of history,

'logic' of event

algos, pain. *rhythmos*, the shape

of a thing in space or time (the same)

there has to be some other meaning

rue de l'Odéon, bookstore with a

model in the window,

Captain Nemo's submarine,

Nemo's childhood.

O the boyhood of your hair,

your father was a little girl,

have you been talking to the rocks again,

the pebbles mixed with sea,

stiff artemisia spiking tall from rubble
and there's a lot of moon in the wind

casting wide so I will come too close

worried about our relationship
you put the matter in someone else's hands
the inspector of wheels
the wine steward of absences

red light low above the mountain ridge
stop when you would go
so many miles to Bethlehem
now all the wind is in one small tree

quince and iron, Eiffel over
all the gods and goddesses come to life
war gives us back our dead

now the wind's gone to the locust
old irises and weeds mixed here
in the corner by the oil shed
like a hortus siccus in the squire's cabinet
of curiosities and sumac
will persist to grow

the seeds of things
mixed in the ceremony of air

settle down to know me
fruit fly on my knuckle
resting from the immensity of space
a moment
 down here
on me

will you ever answer
you who are the actual question?

20 September 2002

PRELUDE TO GEOMETRY

Let this be a line stretching from grace to Magdalen
let the shadow of a line
project itself into no dimensions as
the memory of the idea of a tower.

Then the sun comes out from behind the cloud
autumn equinox breathes in the trees
Jesus on the other side of being dead
I wake up knowing was a petty man I was
my childhood and its complaints my meager manhood
determined to live meanly in the midst of grace,

o my aunt, o her sacred daughter. I tried to save
myself from the family, tried to make the world
into my house my sisters my wife. Fat chance.
I knew how to eat, swell, roar, insinuate,
I listened till I learned how to talk,
read till I could write. The one thing
that mattered was the power
the sky let me feel sometimes, the calling,
the voice I understood as glory.
Not mine but it bathed me
in its lucency sometimes and made me good.

I worked in that light as much as I could.
The glory fell upon me, that was my grace.
That's my story. I am a man who saw a tower
and have walked ever since in its shadow

presuming to measure the star dance
and what he saw he scrawled down as a simple line,
the most honest mark he ever made,
a line from there to here, not ever thinking
about you, there is no you in this story,
not yet, only the beautiful shadow of a line
stretched across the lawn of my life.

21 September 2002

Pour prendre congé

Why give someone your name as you're leaving?
Wasn't the fact between us word enough,
or what passes for a fact, all that skin,
that membrane music? Why give a name
to who you thought I could become? Silent
I came and silent I go, that's the lesson
the Light itself our master teaches us.

21 September 2002

ON RHYME

If there were a rhyme left in the world
what would it be? Exhausted I wake
mindful of business I fall asleep.

Or a stick lies on the ground
like a king on his throne,
everlasting, secure. Earth
after all lets nothing fall.

We have come as far as the old ones went
and have tasted the same wind
down through the same vineyards, same hill.

When I was a little boy I had a bow
drew a target on a cardboard box
and shot an arrow at it in a vacant lot.

The arrow still is on its way.

When it gets there I will be here.

21 September 2002

THE BIG THING

The immense poem.

Gesar. Rama. Arjuna.

But the poem is the hero of the book,
the thing that comes through the years
and talks to us.

That is why
Ramayana begins with Valmiki,
its author, walking around and looking for a man
to pin a poem on.

Why Homer
asks the muses to tell him
about a man. The poem is the hero.

The poem is the great woman
who gives birth to all our local heroes,
your Achilles, my Ulysses.

The poem only, only the poem
talks to us later in the dark.

21 September 2002

CLOUDBREAK

The racist sun
comes in
wakes the human-hating insectry

to bother us.

One more intolerant adult
spoiling our long fun.

21 September 2002