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ORDINARIUS

as a bishop be his throne
a man his wish a woman
her desire

we sell the word
in the plainest wrapper

so the word they hear you hearing
is not the word you hear

the thing I tell you
at the top of my voice
is not the thing you take home
and think about hard in the middle of the night

21 September 2002

FROM REGINALD SCOT

Vine is a great king and an earle, he showeth himselfe as a lion, riding on a blacke horsse, and carrieth a viper in his hand, he gladlie buildeth large towres, he throweth downe stone walles, and maketh waters rough. At the commandement of the exorcist he answereth of things hidden, of witches, and of things present, past, and to come.

Bifrons is seene in the similitude of a monster, when he taketh the image of a man, he maketh one woonderfull cunning in astrologie, absolutelie declaring the mansions of the planets, he dooth the like in geometrie, and other admesurements, he perfectlie understandeth the strength and vertue of hearbs, pretious stones, and woods, he changeth dead bodies from place to place, he seemeth to light candles upon the sepulchres of the dead, and hath under him six and twentie legions.

21 IX 02

Suppose Greek came before Hebrew. Suppose the author of Job saw Greek plays and wrote his own drama, then went and wrote Genesis. Sophisticated origin story, none of the primitive banausic tough guy grunt of Hesiod. Suppose Hebrew a svelte derivative, an epigone of some lost Mediterranean suchness.

21 IX 02

TO BE TRUE

To be true to the skin
to the feeling
not just a little but a lot
to take all of it in
or let it all touch you

to be true to the skin
as a pigeon is true to the sky
or running water after rainstorm
is true to the cobblestone curb
shiny with so many years
true to the flow

to be true to the skin
as the voice fits the ear

or where do the syllables go
you don't catch
the soft ones the hardly breathing
you catch the meaning
but lose the sound

where ion the whorls of your ear
is the lost word stored

to be true to the skin
as this drop of milk rolling down your thigh.

22 September 2002

AEGIDIUS OF ROME

codified
what another man
a Neapolitan
had seen between

the fire and the light.
I had a book of his once
I scarcely read

but last night
another poet trundled in
sporting a flat top toupee
and began to give his reading

had an acolyte
bring down to me in the audience
a saucer with breads
and canapés on it

I blessed them quick
with sign of the cross
then with my open palm
rayed over the food

and a word.
Send it back to him
touched he had
offered me this
episcopal opportunity

there are theologies
inside the merest

suspended in intellect
we divine someone

a person, a skull
beneath the hair.

22 September 2002

CHRONICLE

salted nuts
are never salty enough

+

evolution
explains but cannot
excuse the
weakness of the human toe
has no
business anymore
to do

+

with women in an elevator
what does it matter if up or down?

+

harvestman steps across the deck
he has leg like swans have neck

+

most of my trouble comes
from trying to outlive my reputation

+

if the phone rings
answer me

+

Gulliver, an ordinary
autumn leaf
falls upon a bonsai cypress

+

science says this year's sly invader
turned all the leaves of the locust tree pallid brown

science says it hurts the leaves but not the tree
which may be green again next year, we'll see

+

gallium for pushy broads
tellurium for me

+

jumping from idea to idea
before one knows it
one's lap is occupied

+

Sunday morning
church is on its way

all those people huddled in there
immigrants bound for some cloud America

even further away than we managed to become,
Faster faster, the priest bellows from the pulpit,

I can hear the billows crash on heaven's shore!
But he's not the one who mans the million oars.

22 September 2002

An Editorial for *New Politics*

Let us fight about politics while we can
let us argue while there are still some words around
not yet indentured by the government

Then a season comes, the winter of words
when we can talk, if at all, only by skin
only by signs, the kind that slaves give
when one shift relieves the last
in and out of the mines. We grow
in an orchard of spies, ignorant patriots
desperate to be free of liberty.

23 September 2002

But I wonder is the air
moving when the wind does

or is it like the water of the sea
that never moves
as the wave moves through it

a pure mathematic muscle
rippling its numbers past us

on its way to an inconceivable
stillness we pretend to share?

23 September 2002

American Bully, new breed of dog.
Barks at everybody, wears
shiny new leashes, a gaudy muzzle
studded with stripes and heavenly stars.

23 September 2002

CALLIGRAPHERS ROAST A LAMB

Outside the snow is heavy but not very cold
it arrives like a geometry lesson all lines and swirls
out of a wind that always comes from elsewhere

they sit around the roasting spit inside
watching one another's hands
firelight seems to make the muscles rippling

as if they were still writing
words the snowflakes hiss as they touch the coals
some snow always finds its way in the smoke hole

and the lamb, never very thoughtful,
now remembers nothing.

The smoke moves around the tent,

the men, their faces, the dark
around them, smoke seeking its way
to the small gap at the tent top.

Nothing special up there

but sometimes it is good to be outside.

One of the artists tries to follow the smoky curlicues

with his eyes but even then his hands are still.

Life is that condition where it takes time

for anything to happen, and waiting is the basic human skill.

There must be something else, something between

the fire smoke capriole and the signless sky.

Where maybe the lamb is now, born into thinking.

23 September 2002

BIRTH

To remember
a particular
square dance and
round dance
the defiances

the former
wants people
weaves them
in and out of one
another. Society.

The latter
turns us all
around a common
center, the god
in the middle,
the secret door
we face
whenever our hands touch
the private personal
country we can only
go in together

Square and round
love
to unweave the square dance
into the figure of you
in the middle of me.

24 September 2002

THE WILL TO CHANGE

When I can change my ways
I'll come to you again
because my ways go there
where you sometimes are

shadow of a rose preserved in saly
brown nightmare valentine
arrow right through the sacred pronoun
and a mouse asleep inside your shoe

when the light is good enough
I'll read the timetable
I'll remember the name of your city
and get off there

and my hands will remember where my pockets are
and the steeples remember the way to the sky.

25 September 2002

There are so many excuses
for being me and none of them
explain why dawn's colder than noon
without dragging in the sun

nobody understands how far
away everything is, getting further
faster and faster until a whole day
is just a penny that falls from my hand.

25 September 2002

All the lucifers, the spotted ram
the horns hollow save for some bleak music
a summons
arduous to make

hurts the lip, Rilke rosy,
a poison interval
spill from the sky cup
o god how I prayed for rain

for you, for you to let me touch you
deep in the islands of your difference.

25 September 2002

I dreamt I wrote a book called *The Sexiness of the Irreversible*

that told all about why we love tattoos and piercings,
the thrill of doing something you can't undo

the plunge, the accurate word
pregnancies, religious conversions, circumcision,

so all day long I had to go on thinking
and thinking also is irreversible,

the thrill of saying something you can never take back.
And then I thought of someone else's dream

if she told it to me when she woke
would she lose it forever

and who would the dream belong to now?

25 September 2002

ANOTHER MEANING OF HERMETIC

spend a lot of time in mind
sending x to y, giving useful items
to friends and enemies, arranging
meetings, telling invisible intimates
the interesting things that happen to me
every day on my way to mind.

26 September 2002

nothing ever seems to end
except months
 speed
is another matter

26 IX 02