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CAN WE READ EACH OTHER'S MAIL?

Is it steel? Is it stealing?

I think the Arabs knew how to do it

charcoal in iron the crystals

they wrote with

fire does that make sense?

Blue steel. Swordplay

my uncle's natty saber

and the ditto of Art my other uncle

kept below his bed so the profane

(Aunt Jenny) wouldn't touch it

between his Rosicrucian rituals.

Of course I had a family, everybody's born

of course I'm lying, which is a kind of stealing

and there's been a rash of theft and vandalism

lately in the valley we were hit twice

and that's the truth, you know I think every sin

is embedded in every other, lust in incontinence,

incontinence in disproportion, which is anger,

which blurs the line between self and other,

hence selfishness that cult of an unreal deity

hence lying is the root of all, and the Devil

of your pop song gospels in the father of it,

do you think Jesus ever told lies?

But what about the Power Lies that move society:

immortality, progress, beauty, love,

earth's central location in the universe?

most of this land belongs to me

naturally artists think like landlords sometimes

every vista's theirs and every right to enter upon

seize and transform imagined territory
of course I slid my hand beneath her skirt
that's why skirts are open at the bottom
wouldn't you? The arrogant disorder of desire
leaps through every window, I used to think
then feeling got the better of me, now neither.
I perpend. And wait the glorious saxophone
that heralds the end of time, the angel antics
and clouds carrying elevated personages
whose faces are weirdly familiar
as if the whole world is made of glass.

22 October 2002

BREAK STEP

Don't match mine I dream
about crossing a bridge with you
I'm walking behind you
I study your footsteps
so I can keep a different rhythm
if we all walk the same way
the bridge will fall

the bridge is also you
and goes over the inaccessible
rush of your destiny
also to you on the other side
comparatively stable
on the order of earth and grass
I cross to you
the disharmony of our steps
is vital, too much accord
breaks bridges,
the resonance, the oscillations of amity
wreck the profound
suchness of a given world,
make it into only ours
and then it falls.

And when it falls
we have nothing outside us.
We keep so close
in touch to be different.
Same is everywhere. Difference hard.

22 October 2002

BEING AND WANTING

I gave my name away
when I acknowledged my desire
for no man can both *be* and *want* at once.

Being. If I could be, just be,
then I'd be a garden you could wander in
at will, your will,
rest and bathe and sleep and dream
and in your dream we'd be together

and when you woke up
there'd be some species of forever
all round us like the grass and trees
and we would wade deep in these fountains
we would touch bottom in each other.

But wanting is not the way of that.
Wanting is always over here
trying to abolish itself
for the sake of over there.

No one wants to be with a wanting one
so let me abandon my desire,
rip up the agitated highways
that lead me out of myself
so that I reach you, if I do reach you,
only with empty hands
even if you remember to be you.

22 October 2002

RULE

Let one thing be longer than another.

Let something be longer than skin.

The acreage of self
surrounding what. Rule
inside this hide.

Scandal of great women
that they condescend
to themselves, buy
themselves toys for Xmas in July
all the time. Who am I
to deserve these ashes,
to sit in the gutter
full of describable sensations,
and who puts me on display
in the cage of language
who?

Enough talk about you.

The so-called elements
tried to teach us something
but we called them 'chemical' or 'chemicals'
as if they existed
on their own in some small
sheltered discourse
protected from the ordinary
whereas they are us.

We are put together
by one another,
hardwired to desire
this and only this, this sacred

predestined whatever
that is our meat
and that man's poison,
all the cetera around the single this.

Now who is longer than whoever?
I belonged to whatever she told me
the skin is the flag
of the secret commonwealth
you wrap yourself in
supposing yourself to be its kind

but we know better.
We always know better than you,
we listen to all the beehives inside you
we gather the patient ballots of your mind
and decide, sometimes we set
a little pimple on your cheek
to tell you and everybody else
something is deciding inside,
working its way out,
you're struggling, you're on the ropes,
the wolves are at your heels but still
you're on the golden staircase
smelling already the honeysuckle of paradise
where it isn't always spring or anything
but always worth the ride.

23 October 2002

MAN, FALLING

The falling man
examines the geology of the cliff
he passes on his way

to a purely physical solution.

Writing too fast
to say anything.

How can you parse a scream?

23 October 2002

[*QUARRELS*] **THE AIR**

— What would you do if you got what you want?

— Want another thing.

— What is there were no other things?

— I'd want whatever came to mind.

— And what if nothing came to mind?

— That wouldn't be bad but it never happens, never happened, not even once, my whole life.

— What if there were a road that took you to a place where there are no roads
and an angel stood behind you
to keep you from turning back?

— In that place there would be no angels either.
They depend on one another
water always needs something else to wet.

— I remind you again what Heraclitus said:
'It is death for the soul to be wet.'

— First tell me more about the place
I want to know a place
where some road leads
but no roads lead away

tell me the amber fixity

to which desire brings me
if I read your threats
correctly, have I been there
am I there now?
I ask because the place I am
knows nothing about leaving.

— Do you mean here?

— The light is good. The air fresh.

23 October 2002

AS IF THERE WERE A PLACE TO BEGIN

And there is of course nothing like it
the brilliant wrinkled cellophane
crumpled under the Christmas tree is as
close to primal as we come
we who mistake our memories
with whatever it is we're coming from
as if the abalone shell that says
Souvenir of Mexico really is Acapulco
right there in your hand. Memory
in fact is cellophane, peel it off
to get to the present underneath
the gift inside, beyond — pick
your preposition and begin unpacking.
As your sentence goes, you're fated.
Sooner or later to get to the Given,
the war you were born for, the crucifix.
But did you ever want to be a horse
mist in the trees, the leaves
falling like another kind of light?

24 October 2002

BLUE DECIDERS

Be overt, obvious, open your shirt
and show us the sky.

That's what the ancient shepherd always wanted
why he hummed, too
poor for a flute, too early for language,
hummed his searching little memories
to find the stranger
who wove the world
and could take the clothes
and show him, there,
right there, between
the animals and the sleeping rock.

24 October 2002

THEATER OF THE LOST

Now the Moscow hostages
at the HopΔ-Ocr show
are facing death, a long
terrible estrangement from their
own lives at least

and that is what theater always is,
when you manage to get out
you leave a piece of your life behind

the stage captures you
your soul gets caught in the web
of curtains, language, music, scenery,

your life is left in the limelight
and you crawl home
a glad fraction of who you used to be.

24 October 2002

[end of Notebook 250]

THERE WERE SO MANY TO WAIT FOR

and they all were grain.

I woke up worried about bread,
how I don't eat it, and how holy it is,
even before Jesus, the sacrament
of yeast and heat and air made edible,
that's what it is, the actual air
that rises from the fire of grain,
the knead of water. Air that you eat.

There is a bread world, and another without bread.

This is the real religion, do you, eat bread,
do you take food as the sign of life,
do you loaf? In my sleep

I have become a breadless man,

Jean Sans Pain and wake up glad.

And all the also wine is in my mind.

24 October 2002

[start of Notebook 251]

AGRONOMY OF THE HEART

But you can't use heart today
the natives hear the word and run away

they know when someone names that organ
he doesn't mean organ
he means the whole animal
to take prisoner

to make the body sing
but someone else's song
far from any Holy Zion
but its own self

so shut up about your feelings
polecat, and be quiet in the woods,
we'll know you're in there
by the smell. We all
are redolent of our last desire.

Heart me no hearts, and if you have
something to say about the growing season
or secret laws of spinach say them now
then we'll have no more of such analysis

and fall wordless to most music.

24 October 2002

RŪKHĀ D'QŪDSHĀ

the Holy Spirit
(from an Assyrian website)

Time to be absurd again
a trowel and an apron
to mark my membership
in the Church of the Imaginary

where each member
is priest and congregation
saint and devil, angel and
some say deity itself.

Lonely as a prayer
we wait for night time.
I lift the ritual carefully
from where it's stored

between lust and longing
in the old chestnut box
my unborn grandson made
in some other galaxy

deft with unknown tools.

24 October 2002

VELVET BLOOD

It's not actually necessary to watch the show
to know you don't like it, words have smells
that waft in from titles, even the days of the week
can't overcome their reputation, you wouldn't date
a Wednesday kind of guy, not worth your karma,
sad chops for gull folks. *Velvet Blood* now
I'd run right out to see, a photo of the moon
rising over Paraguay, a lot of sinister émigrés
standing around. I have no native language
is what I mean, the water fountain's broken,
the spout I bend to slurp just oozes
from god knows who has kissed you, nickel lips.
In Cambridge I hung out with a dinner club
The Condescenders and we were good at it
until the whale steaks ran out at Cronin's
and the car barn filled up with bootleg DAFs,
a little Dutch car you could send through the mail
though no one ever did. No one ever did anything.

24 October 2002

CAPTURE RATIO

Signal as against that other stuff
the unspoken words bother us
with no present meaning —
yet I credit ancient prophecy —
the meaningless will teach you

and the incomprehensible
will wake up inside you gently
as the science of your life.
They will be something like children
and hold you by something like your knees,
they know more than you do
but they don't say much,
like crows in that respect, loud, clear,
but you have to work to understand.

25 October 2002

THE VISTA

Standing at the window
I remember you sitting there –
everything was present, complete

there was nothing more to want
like a sky, complete
from horizon to horizon

All you, all here.
Out there foxes go
about their businesses

in green mystery.

24 October 2002

HAVE I FORGOTTEN SOMEONE

or is it death who's sleeping
and left a friend or two alive

the camp grows smaller
and still no sign of Palestine

we wander in the years like landscapes
night time and no moon

until your skin begins to wonder
not where is the goal
but where is the journey even

in all this standing still
or staggering a little forward
with a man like me

who thinks he can talk his way out of anything
but hasn't said a word for days.

25 October 2002

IT ONLY HURTS WHEN YOU APPLY THE RULE

Too old too ordinary too needy too
whatever the next thing is that bothers you about me

for Christ's sake, Miriam, don't you know
I could be a summer day in Oslo if I wanted to
or a silver husky with one blue eye?

It's up to you to push the right buttons,
you can't blame me if you're too bored to try.

And I know your name isn't Miriam,
I call all the women that, those boygirl
impostor Madeleines (that's the name)

who sit at my feet. I knew it was Jewish.
All I know about you really is you're you.

But isn't that enough in an Age of Mechanical
Reproduction? So wake up and need me,

the plough that breaks your plain, et cetera,
the old American fantasy, o god I love you,
song scatter, snake bite, the lizard of Oz.

25 October 2002

THE GERMAN QUESTION

When does *Paar* mean couple, when does it mean a pair?

We do it with couple (meaning two exactly of people,
lovers even maybe, a few of anything else, don't count)
but not with pair (which always is two, people, birds,
socks, dice. Now when Old Parr grew past three digits
he grew very famous just by being old. That's how
it is with me, eventually my tree with drop
its millionth lemon and they'll all be amazed and say
How! Amid such snow! So sour but so many!
Amaze us further, crooked tree, try to spit a cherry
our way some day! I try and split my sides and die
still wondering what any word actually means
alone or together with friends, in your mouth, o
my god your mouth, or in another's, even mine.

25 October 2002