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DREAM

At 5:58 AM a dream, which continued half consciously and half otherwise for an hour or more - I was reading a collection published by a Canadian middle school of poems written in memory of one of their students who had died in an accident - smothered, as if under plastic sheeting. All the testimony accepted the accidental nature of her death, but I felt somehow equipped with another knowledge, that the victim (a girl in her early teens, perhaps) had died as a result of some innocent prank or practical joke that misfired - but no one was addressing that. Personally, I felt a certain guilt - but I had not done anything to account for that feeling. It seemed like the guilt of knowing something more than was public - always an uneasy kind of knowing, I find.

Most of the dream was reading through this magazine-like memorial album. Most of the poems were amateurish, sincere testimonies to the dead girl, or, more likely, adumbrations of the personal senses of loss or horror or confusion on the part of the writers. My reading was punctuated by waking up into real time, then falling back into dream, which meant the magazine. Sometimes I'd wake determined to write down some of the passages in the dream, and once I actually did so, and covered a page with writing, only to find that the act of writing had itself taken place in a mezzanine of the dream wherein I thought I had awakened. When I did wake, of course, no page, no writing, and all still to do.

As I leafed through the magazine yet again, still not awake, still rehearsing in my almost-waking mind certain phrases of description [now lost] that I meant to write down, I finally came upon a very good poem, written either by a teacher or an older graduate of the school. This poem dealt with the girl's death in terms not connected with the circumstances of her dying or the relatives and friends she left behind (like all the other poem). Instead, the writer (a male, I recall) focused on the connection of Language and Death, and my critical fortune would be made if I could remember his connections and argument. Briefly, now, I think that language is both necessitated and made possible (as if in human genetics) by death; without death, language would not exist. And the purest language - that of poetry and love, according to the poem - was the closest to death. There is an energetic, pure dyadic relationship between the two, each somehow strengthening the other.

When the alarm went off at eight, I was still dreaming in and out of this magazine and its narration. The feeling tone of guilt and anxiety from the earlier hours of experiencing this dream was gone now, and I was just reading and thinking along those lines, death and language.

16 February 2001

=====

so much comes back
you make
so much come back

lace-like pattern
branches leave on snow

handling memory
among all our other nightmares
of attention

to handle
what comes back by itself
(you make it come back,

lace-like pattern
of then on now,

this frail pale present

to bear such ancient freight)

ancient luster of your cloth
damask to my finger tips

handling
memory against a sense of future

that's what counts, to dissolve
all this into that

blaze of light from sudden open door.

17 February 2001

=====

Looking over
across the table
the young woman
pleased, absorbed
in the text before her,
in the lecturer's middle
distance remarks

and I stare at her
sensing my own distractedness
my weakness

I am weak

and the nature of my weakness is desire,
my availability to desire

yetzer

the centrifugal principle, to find
the meaning of the moment
outside myself

or in the mind outside,

the particular
beauty of her undistracted smile.

The *yetzer* is inclination, a deflection
from the mind to the percept,
an animated turning, a longing, a bending
towards,

and this is the root weakness in my presence.

17 February 2001
[from notes of late January]

=====

The things I want to tell
The wings I want to touch

Tie me to knowing

No, keep simple, it
Is wonderful again

How did I stand it

You were away
And I was not anything.

From late January 2001
17 February 2001

Poetry
is a natural mistake

to say something to her
I think you want to hear too.

17 February 2001

EARTHWORD

Name the problem
I means to cure

Distance altitude
force of lion mouth

made to open
to roar

order
engorge order
smooth

caryatid flanks
by rough and tumble portico

identity
is not much use

when anything actually is.

17 February 2001
(from notes of last week)

if there were a method
an ancient method
gouged in mud, bound in reeds

form grows
from what we need

as you are
the shape of what I mean
when I say there is someone in the world
besides myself

there is someone to whom my selfishness
is transparent

because her father set his daughter
to turn the wheel

the great wheel from which all form
suddenly remembers itself as space.

17 February 2001

ELEMENTS OF THEOLOGY

The world does not begin with a creative act
But with a perceiving

This perceiving is the famous word
Gasp'd out in wonderment at and as
The first instant of perceiving

Itself forever mediated
By what it pro/voked
Called into voice

The primal word we were forced to speak
By the brunt of being us and beholding.

17 February 2001

The earnest imagination
is a shaggy hemlock rusty with
winter beside the dumpster

the frivolous imagination
is a sad poet bleeding to death from a flesh wound
no one struck

for flesh is all.

17 February 2001

Absence I'm sorry
absence is the place itself

the remedy
is to re-mediate

go back through the images
till the first icon shows

your face
gazing at what is not me

yet intercepts me and holds
and makes endure

another birth, another departure,
another coming

home. You, looking at me.

17 February 2001

I made a remark the other day about the historical novel being maybe the proto-Postmodern genre (in that it embodies expropriation, violation of boundary, penetrative transgression). It has come back to haunt me.

Suddenly I find myself facing *The Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (whose historical events precede their formal embodiment by about the same distance as separates contemporary bodice-slashers from their Renaissance fantasies), the *Aeneid*, the Grail Romances, the plays of Shakespeare, to go no further - all of them firmly embedded in an invented past.

Yet my prejudice against the genre. And not just mine. Most of us view the authors of historical romances as second-class citizens; maybe we forgive Woolf her Orlando aberration because of the mordant contemporaneity of *The Waves*, just as we (not as readily, maybe) forgive Thomas Mann for the Joseph tetralogy because of the modernist agenda of *Doktor Faustus* or *The Magic Mountain*.

Why does a genre that seems to have created the great classics now produce - or seem to produce - works of banality?

all this while I wanted to skim something out of the soup
such as a fish that somehow resisted boiling, some irritable carp
sturdy but annoyed at all that heat, or a golden ring
that resisted gravity, floated on the surface winking at me
like an old drunk telling a tall tale — like the sun, never
expecting me to believe all that mouthful of light
spewed over the world every morning rain or shine

and why? that's what I'm trying to discover from the soup,
the broth of things, why is there so much to go around
and so many people hungry? why is daylight evident
to the poor — shouldn't they somehow get less of it,
shouldn't they not be able to hear the soft late winter rain?
we used to pour hot maple syrup into buckets of snow
and read our prophecies from the weird shapes sugar took,

but there were no rules, just insight or imagination. or an
angel, maybe it's an angel, stands beside and whispers in the ear
that looks like a little house you will be someone's wife
or it's a book isn't it you'll have to write and write
and walk along the melodious beaches of New England
crying about your lost loves. Why did we even bother
to look, our fate is obvious, every inclination tilts me towards
the inevitable me-ness you knew all along. And I dare not
tell you all the things I saw when I first saw you.

17 February 2001

We impersonate the gods until we become them.

This is the Rule of Red:

Start with color
(and all it means

and all it brings
and all it sings)

let color lead the way.

The color of the god *is* the body of the god.
Become color.

Be red.

18 February 2001

OWED TO FREUD

the snow what's left of it is bright and hard
after the scorch of zero
and the trees look more than ever like the nervous
system of the planet, twigs and vines and twists
into the intimate infinities where no eye follows

for feeling is not all about seeing. As once at Sounion
a woman stood poised beneath the cliff
wearing nothing but her color,
start with color
and then that place from which the colors come
namelessly obvious behind the light

presses in on us, a great travertine column crumbles,
the dark marble everywhere, its edges crust into white powder

since color is not for seeing
it is an evidence of *le niveau mental*
early alienists swore by, spoke to, discerned the moral
probity of their patients by, handwriting, bone structure, soft
kisses of untensed lips,

a certain *abaissement* they said
of that mental level
led the personality so transfigured
into the dark openings where voices come,
hysterics,
all voice comes from the womb,

every language is the mother's tongue
speaking inside you still.

Channeling. Opening. The obscure doorway
where the child stands
eavesdropping on the motions of the dark.

18 February 2001

widespread hood
a cobra sways
protecting the mind of the world
beneath it

from what rain?
From what does mind
have to be protected,
Buddha?

No shield
for that pervading.

18 February 2001

=====

But thinking is a rare way to do it,
An alternative to oboe music, maybe,
Or instead of a late afternoon espresso under the arcades —

For such replacements, thinking might be suitable.

But not for making, where the blood has
Other engorgements in that far geography of brain
Where wilderness begins, the howls and screams we hear as hands.

19 February 2001

Exalt the differences

we are maybe between

the Green Lion and the Tree of Sights
all mirrory with implications of an ego glimpsed
between the frondure and the frond

an alleluia of departure leaving firmly fixed
among the leaves the shadow of a Face

crazy sycamore blue gum tree Norway spruce
a name another name a man running for his life
from love and vice versa,

blue shroud
cast on the planetary lovers locked together

ophidian a nest of snakes a nest of two:
the earth
serene in sky.

19 February 2001

“One has to include in one’s theory of the development of a human being the idea that it is normal and healthy for the individual to be able to defend the self against specific environmental failure by a freezing of the failure situation. Along with this goes an unconscious assumption (which can become a conscious hope) that opportunity will occur at a later date for a renewed experience in which the failure situation will be able to be unfrozen and re-experienced, with the individual in a regressed state, in an environment that is making adequate adaptation. The theory is here being put forward of regression as part of a healing process, in fact, a normal phenomenon that can be properly studied in the healthy person.” (from Winnicott, “Metapsychological and Clinical Aspects of Regression within the Psychoanalytic Setup,” 1954)

the normal ring
of a word
sounded
through the blue

comes after you
wants to slither
deep into your
permission

can't get away
from what you have made
I belong to you
molecular

we are
what am I going
to do with you
now ever after.

19 February 2001

the unavoidable condition of constant disclosure

— Owen Renik

I had a dream that ended with a god,
It went like this,
Some words were speaking and I wrote them down

Now most are missing but these stayed:

*To die for that young religion
All strange serenity*

Red goddess and a purple god.

There is no road the word won't use,
Any speaker can be saying my words

And what comes out of my mouth
Might come from anyone anywhere

Because to say anything at all is to say everything.

20 February 2001

