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POLITICS

Looking at an empty world
empty but a crow
a broken branch
a piece of glass. You.

You are the president of this.
I vote for you with every breath.

I move to the shadow of the House of Dew
the Pink House mansion where you live
so deep in the tradition of fecundity
I live off your life

Empty as I am
everything comes from you

if I were a piece of jade I would give myself to you
if I were obsidian I would be your mirror

but as it is I am an animal at your gate
an inference a part of speech you need
to make a complete sentence
a shadow to illuminate your light.

I am old as language. I am stupid as silence.
I am no one. But I am yours.

28 December 2001

JOYCE

Because no man can articulate simplex the object of desire, the actual text your desire inscribes as you in your world, the deeps of that surface absolute and catholic. Because at first he was too shy to say the thing or things he meant, and later, after silence and repression had made those once perhaps simple things unbearably complex, he could not say them simply, they were lost in the multiplicities of contexts and instances, so had to be spoken as manifolds, multiplexes, guesses, allusions, illusions. A thing had become its history in him. Desires had become history, so that to say anything meant to say everything. Hence *Finnegans Wake*. Hence the 'enlarg'd & numerous' word he has to utter. A word he makes us pronounce, so he could know himself again at last, my own desire safe in the mouth of the other.

28 December 2001

Learning to speak language
is the hardest thing
I ever have to do.

I am still trying,
this English I can read pretty well
and write fair
eludes me in the speaking.

Why did I study Latin Greek German Hebrew Spanish French Italian Gaelic
and Chinese when I should have been learning to speak American?

What a fool I've been.

Maybe only trying to learn Tibetan was any help
helped me learn to speak English.
Helped me to know a little bit what I was trying to say
or at least know who was speaking.

28 December 2001

TARNHELM

1.

My kind of hat
on my kind of head
makes me invisible

then I can see you
as you are
both of us not distracted

by what we say
all the time
to keep from talking

2.

dressed in silence
I listen to your skin
you are my rosicrucian

I taste the morning
on you, the milk
of all your doubt

3.

because I am not there
you think

because I am not
different from air

so when you move
you pass through me

again and again
mist of my knowing you
you know me

4.

every one alive
lives through his image
in the eye of the other

I am a head in a hat
a smear of grease

rainbow on wood
your table at morning

28 December 2001

men may not speak or write about a woman's body

men are barely allowed to look at that window
and are never allowed just to look through it

and are not allowed to say what they might see
and if by chance, glinting through the glory of the windowpane
or framed by the bones of the window itself
they see anything at all they may not speak

so I come to you silent about what most concerns me
the touch of you and the wield of you and how through you
a world could open onto the terrible geology of my need

I am not allowed to see but have to struggle towards
resentful and ignorant and full of love

...
28 December 2001

Things to know another with:
two crows stroll up a little hill
but they keep going into the sky

marriage is like that
to go through the whole situation
whatever that is, whatever
it actually means to go

There is a together in this story
all we have to do is find it

Land beyond sky; speech beyond metaphor.

29 December 2001

new year, new years,
years and years of them,
boxes of years, some
shaped like stars,
some like paper snakes that wriggle on the wind,
some shaped like water, that is
no shape at all, just on and on

29 December 2001

ROMAN VIRTUES

1.

To melt the roads to find
a way into Deseret
every street a promised land —

sub urbe prospero
beneath a flag
no man can see

road work
to be here

in the long damnation
of the particular

hurry over Jordan
cause it is Sunday
morning and they play
those cheesy hymn tunes

radio multiplex church tomb
where god is slain
and who knows if he lives again

the real
miracle
would be loving
in the senses

taking care
of all these is
and letting no one fall

a city is a ship that has no overboard.

Likeness of a ruler
measuring every inch justly

to have become a number
in your arithmetic
belong bougainvillea
and still come home

the pierces the looms
the bouquet of lilacs someone
some god as like as not
set out on the black table
in the embowered window
over a burning street

unconsumed

city strokes
broken car
waterfountain this
hydrant hard

pallor of a black man's hand

swampsunk this heart
only the work of hands is free

call this the Decency
straw before snow storm
dust grain in hail heart

everything forms

2.

so there is morgue to it
the marries

all the lousy movies
ennobled by her recurrent hips

as if to look at her

that way

midship
were maidenhead again

and the voyage into action just begun
would still get there

beyond the oceanic vagueness of representation
into can we really call it the real

3.
of course sarcastic.

Every image
is a lyrical attack

on how we don't see
except commodity

the blind buying from the blind

but the image perishes
as it speaks

and this elapsing
leaves us free

hence it is said
the image buys us back from hell

4.
every winter the president goes shooting birds
they trespass through his sky

we are guided by less than eloquent leaders
sticky with blood and feathers

fallen from their little pleasures
we also are

 whereas an image
unmakes the world
so you see what you can't see

have never seen, the truth
inside a speaking man

an image leaves you
in the peace of yourself

rapt into the seeing
as if there were always someone there

5.
no, not politics,
only the particular

that pillory
of presidents

the sarcastic fact
acute amid somnolent theory

6.
haunted by habit
I said it all before

change the words
might change the story

but who knows?
Who is Parsifal,

how could there be no war?

7.

Desire is a lawn
lost in the moonlight

when people are talking
you know you are not there

but sometimes you can see between their lines
the silent outstretched country

you've looked for all your life
mesas in moonlight and a sleeping wolf

I want to be the friend
who looks at you across the table

and gives you the courtesy of his country
and lets you think your way through his conversation

all the way to the horizon

which is yours,
always yours

alone in the call.

30 December 2001

can a thing
be alone
in the sun?

ionization
of the mind

why are all images
singular

to see this thing
to notice it

alone in all its devious
contexts

this one light thing

a woman's breath
could blow the steel of it away.

30 December 2001

finding my way to it
not yet

the faltering

I must invent
a road
to being

start with the goal
and just be there

the great temple looks like a coffee can
with paint brushes soaking in it
and a hundred thousand worshippers
clustered at the doors
you can hear them singing
any time you pick up a fallen leaf

but I can't
and why would you do that

smell it, earth and mould and winter air
smell it, that is the music

the famous book you thought
barbarians burned before you were born.

30 December 2001

LAST MIDNIGHT

what could I reach if my hand were a winter mist
fondling its way through our little woods?

I think I will be that king again
an arrow laid low on New Years Day in his forest riding

we walked through today
the same ones the same oakleaves scalloped pale underfoot

of course a year is busy ending any
measure we make up is bound to its edges

the sun will cut right through it
and there will be our hands again

reaching out through the pathology of morning
to find the patients who were born to test our skill

I could hear the horse hooves pounding soft behind us
each step opening the new frozen crust of earth

30 December 2001

Woke up on the train to Venice
a New York subway though
almost to Mestre I didn't
want to go there though I would be glad
at the station when they pour me
a crowd of me out onto the broad steps

and the water is there already, and the light
utterly different from the light I saw from the train,
it's always that way, but why
now were all these derelicts asleep on the train
spread out over all the seats
dirty, dangerous to my health?

Is this death in Venice I'm slow casting
suitable aggiornamento, AIDS not plague,
homeless men who have slipped
through the cracks in our society,
death as the last failure of commodity?
But how glorious the station will be
with those great bakeries alongside it
and the canal at my feet and the little boats
in the eternal sidewise glory of Venezia.

It would almost be worth it, to be
in Venice again. Worth what? Dying?
A subway ride with smelly sleepers?
I have journeyed beyond my race and religion,
my gender I'll toss aside like a dirty glove
and what will be left of me but Venice,
some unborn splendor half-drowned in a prosperous lagoon.

31 December 2001

Dream power bad.

Articles of clothes
by which one know

the identity of your fellow travelers.
Look — none of them have faces.

How bright and pretty the morning looks,
even now the grass is green

each branching consequence of every
tree and bush is clear

you can follow every line
to infinity, which is no place

where they have no faces
only clothes, only old blankets

and why are they traveling in my sleep
and where will they think they are

when I wake up,
isn't this the cheap rich wine of midnight

that spews the dawn, dreams
mean nothing except to remind

I bring evil with me on my journey
and every crime knows how to be at home in me.

I am every one of those who sleep.
It is the last place we can be together
hopeless in the empty piazzas of the dream.

31 December 2001

ABSOLIRRITATIONS, RIXATIOUS KINFOLK & STARRY NIGHTS

A song for winter
Sung already
In the title of it
And fare thee well.

31 December 2001

Two brown legs of the chair
reflect in the windowpane
joining the slender saplings out there
and their own shadows on the pale
wooden wall behind the chair
all standing in the same window
straight straight straight
bundled in the fascist light.

31 December 2001

We were talking about dream last night
or maybe weren't talking at all maybe just dreaming
about talking with you I miss you
do you want to walk up to the post office
and see if either of us sent us some mail
we could read on the way home
littering the letters behind us for the world
to trace our course of empire by
how I became you and you became something better than me

why is it mail always comes from strangers
all the stuff I love about you won't
fit in an envelope the government
is keeping us apart they don't want us to remember
the amethyst scarf or the performance of Tristan we were late for
and we still are waiting to begin, cheese
for instance we see eye to eye on, I like it
you don't at least the referent is plain as the moon
and I love your amber shadows and you love my pretensions

the way I speak High Dutch we used to call it before I was born
which wasn't so long ago just look at your garden
rock in the middle an amateur carved an an old man's name
still green with moss did you know Mozart
was an Aquarius? when I was your age
I wasn't born yet, it all came later
when a book fell out of a girl's pocket
I picked up and read it and here I am
following its instructions to the letter

it all is in some book you know
just a matter of oh you found it already let's read
it quietly hip to hip I mean my eyes

on your page your hands lettering me ride
I mean read as if the dining room table
were a raft on a great river flowing from book to book
and no need to change our socks or go to work
who needs money who needs cellphones we are so close
if we just sat here and did nothing

how long would it be before they came and took us away?

31 December 2001