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A WORD TOO EASY TO READ

From Sichuan province mostly
like weather or mosquitoes
we bring to pray. Bring everything
you ever heard and say it,
that will be prayer. Kaddish
for Robert Barlow, kaddish
for Kadath in the Cold Waste,

the lost charm of fear
when fear was somewhere else but
came here bat-winged with moonlight
or dog-wolf in mist, a call
could be owl either, or a girl
born wrapped in a caul who knows
what will become of your desire,
Sire, but will not tell, no,
not even if you stake her
to tons of gold and dip a ruby
big as a plum between her tits,

no, never. Now fear lives here,
however. Now fear is now.
That's the terror with our Edgar
Poes, our H.P.L.s, our frightened
frighteners. Any word
is too easy to read. Any sign
you look at is a broken wall.
Tibetans and barbarians pour in,
the tea is stale, the old ox
will barely let me ride him. The sun
is in the sky now, but what about later
when the gibbous moon sneers
Rigoletto-crazy from a sky too close?

Sit down and spend the rest of the day
looking at a single word. A word
has everything in it. Through it.
Past it. You can get everywhere

from here. And they can come too,
climb through the word and get to you.
No wonder people get drunk
and kill themselves, to get away,
to be quiet. A word is eternal
but it's the only thing that is,
you stare at it all day long, the *Chinese*
Written Character as a Medium for
Poetry (poetry!) is only the least of it,
a special case, a forlorn beauty
built on wrongness and yearning and music.
Any word will do it. Like Jone's beehive
heart, every word holds all the rest.

16 September 2000

LA CREATION DU MONDE

In the space link
as if a roving tower
fell into its own shadow
and disappeared

the way we do
when we fall, girl
balances beaux
till suddenly none

or too many
like bees when roses
are supposed to
be just for you —

the link with moon skin
broken, the solar gossip
glibbed down your milk-
infested ears

you want to be a mammal
and I'm not sure
there is a different
agenda I am owned by

trade me I am a man
half-beast half-Bourse
I want to know the value
of everything I want

to sell it to you.
My love hurts you
like husband coming
home drunk and mad

at the whole world
you happen to be
for him, he hits you again
his tears are cheap

so much liquid in him
overflows the boundary
of the word he says
over and over the sorry

the pain though is genuine
at least for a while
and then the memory
is nothing but memory.

16 September 2000

WHEN THE MIND STOPS

When the mind stops

When the mind stops thinking
who goes on

When the mind stops thinking
is there a language left

is there a language
that says what it says
no matter what the mind
was or is not thinking

no matter what it thinks
it's thinking

no matter what it thinks it's thinking?

Some questions are more like answers

When the mind stops
who is running down the road
who is weary a frilly print and who is raining
who is not as young as who used to be

who is swimming?
When the mind stops thinking
someone else takes up the slack

someone else is thinking

always thinking

some answers are more like questions

Who's driving
Who is that who touched me in the crowd

I came down from heaven
to take out the garbage

who is thinking

what is who thinking about
when all the garbage has been taken out

is thinking someone?

Is thinking
just someone who is thinking?

Or is thinking always thinking

thinking itself along
and the mind goes to sleep while thinking's thinking
and the mind wakes up to find it thinking

is it itself that's thinking
or is thinking thinking?

Came down to earth
to take the garbage out,
by the roadside stack the dreck,
people come at dawn in trucks
and vanish it, this
is called sanitation
which, combined with opera,
makes up what we call
civilization,

all the rest
is savagery fried chicken prose

a girl sits stiff and tall and cold
in an otherwise empty jitney
on her way to breakfast

what is she thinking

what are the passing windows the hurrying
maple trees doing in her
by way of thinking,

 what is last night
saying to her in the morning, her eyes
held a little closed
against the inaugurating light,

what is she thinking?

And Aphrodite asked Psappho: Who
 Is thinking you now Who
 Gives you so much
 Desire and refusing

 Who confuses you now
 With her blue thinking, who?

And the famous poet answered with a famous poem
saying that thinking
had got into her blood

a lean infection
like the sinews of a fire
thought its way through her body

till there was no part of her flesh that was not thinking

thinking: who is thinking?

Who is thinking me now?

17 September 2000

HOLY DYING

The day has a name
but no word in its mouth
the way a stone has milk

Drink me, I am the last
thing you remember before
your body grows so quiet

that it stops and just this picture
or idea or whatever it is
stays in your mind, a man

telling you to remember.

18 September 2000

The first poem I ever wrote was about these mountains.
I lived in the city and didn't know any better.
The mountains seems to me like a great sleepy girl
and I wanted to touch her and go live in the places she was
all peaks and valleys and shadow.
I had discovered Analogy
and it scared the hell out of me.

I wanted to know that woman,
already I thought of her as a woman,
and what she was was a mountain really
or not a mountain really, an anthology of hills
stretching away from me
the anxious reader with long arms
forever I wanted to reach out and hold.

It was a sort of a poem, it had lines,
words fitting the little story of the line
into the sprawling epic of desire
that was the poem, any poem,
it had words in it, curves was one,
and contours and even hips.
I looked down at the sad yellow flat paper
and the stumbling graphite of the words
and felt even so the woman's power
coming up at me fierce from what I thought
I said, but that the words now
were saying all by themselves and what could I do,
the terrible distances
between me and everyone else, her,
suddenly gone, and the paper

seemed soft from the warmth of her breath,

I was terrified, I tore it up
and threw the pieces of it down the toilet, flushed them
back out into the system,
let water cure fire, cure terror,

but what happened is that the poem I was trying to lose
went out into the world, every word does, we can't help it,
what we speak stays spoken forever,
all the words run out into the mind world around us,
where else can they go, the soft scars of what we think
and thinks us back, out loud, or suddenly on paper

like a person we touch who wakes up and touches us too.

19 September 2000

OLYMPIC HYMN

O if that one over there could be under here
The woman in the window in the rain

Old man you saw her, you tell the story
The rest of us were watching the runners

And you watched her
You watched her make sense of the window

And reach through it, her bare arms
Reaching out to the rain

As if it were something she could know
Something she could bring into herself

While we were watching television, we
Were leagues away and watching

Watching, but you saw.
Old man, tell us what you saw

When it was night and the woman
Not specially young and certainly not old

With bare arms, dressed in a simple
Dress, blue maybe, her hair dark

By color or was it just the night
When she reached out into the rain,

What did you see? What do you think
Even now, thousands of years later,

The next morning, she really wanted,
Really reached for? Some gold

Experience hidden in the night?
We watched swimmers and riders, leapers

And fallers, we saw the young exult
Like nasty brutes, we saw them cry,

Sportured animals trapped in striving,
We watched and thrilled and mourned

But you saw. Did you see enough
To know what she was thinking?

We have watched everything won and lost
And picked up and forgotten, and now we know

There is nothing in the world worth knowing
Except what someone else is thinking.

Do you think you know what she was thinking?

20 September 2000

Love nearer than thought
Come stand in light

Let me see you first in dream
The way the other gods stand clear

Apart from my sitcom
My eternal shtick

I want to meet the woman
Who dreamed of me last night

Meets me this morning
For the first time

I want to know a whole new world
Turns out to be you.

September 2000

but how did you know she wore a tattered dress

it had to be linen in the color called natural in catalogues
where they show women standing smiling in nature
with loose unwrinkled new clothing standing around them
having nothing to do with anybody inside a thing and a person
a person inside a thing a thing we want to put around
some other person and think it's the same thing a thing
is never the same a thing is never the same

and that's what is natural and why this woman in threadbare
linen appears walking through your doorway in a dream
you know it's not natural you know it's a dream a dream is a thing
that holds us in its indifferent arms a while then lets us go

if we were natural we would never dream any more than a stone does

when he sees her
she overtakes him
with her eyes
she smiles as if a path
were between them
he holds his breath
like a white dress
she may be wearing
tattered and soft
worn out from being seen
the stains on it mean
carrying the old world
into the new

the stains are names
and mean nothing
is left of me
now you have come

later when everything was later
this dress of hers was taken off
and tossed out onto the grass
to lie under the moon and stars
until it belongs to no one

this is no one's shirt
and when she put it on
the next morning she
was nobody again
new and soon gone

and all he knew is that he knew
she had to wear a tattered linen dress
so that her flanks were sand like Egypt
and the hem of it tossed like sails
at sunset with not much wind
and through the tears in the cloth
he could see the September moon
rise over another country
where he can never ever live.

21 September 2000
Boston

Would it be enough to greet you
there among the stumbling choirs of heaven
trying to sell a grand cantata
a creation myth a jet plane on fire

a tattered carpet

fly over the spindle
it's about time I made some money doing this
it's a pity we don't remember
how things work

:an angular Cantata

a round angular thing of singing
meaty fish swimming in a dry sea (that's music, partner) —

would it have been enough
to be God
once-meal deity
before the struggling altos unbosom their plaint?

To be God without grieving!

Glad as a crow in the morning
over the mountains of meaning
up on the bracing tableland of silence
in sight finally of the water, the real sea.

2.

Island people have no religion.
Just the island, weather, waves,
Vikings coming to investigate —
That is their whole theology.
And fish their only priests.

3.

So even now do I know what I want?
Of course not, she says. You

are a peddler of cute confusions,
your Babel a specious eloquence
and anything nobody understands
is supposed to be music. At least
you bring your mess to market,
and let money clean you up a little bit.
But if only you could finally commit!

But that's a word with two m's,
two me's

and one me wants you, passion, and one
me wants the luminous apart.

Which is vacuous and thingless, buster.

I know, darling, but a banana has no heart.

22 September 2000
Boston

SECRET OF MY LONGEVITY

I cherish
My fragility.

22 September 2000
Boston
(dreamt as such)

It's about time I wrote a painting by Carlo Crivelli,
Golden wires of her hair, his angel or just some girl
Helping the green Christ down from the cross,

Golden fibers of his or her hair, real gold, laid on
By a method outlined in handbooks, appliqué, say,
Not sure if him or her, or is an angel neutral, just,

Just lucid and believable but with a huge vocabulary
And the only word of it we understand is gold.
Her soft pale hand below the thigh of the dead man.

22 September 2000
Boston

THE NAP

It was a long time before he began to suspect. His days had always seemed full, and still did. The events and most of the obligations of his life still held his interest. So why did he begin to take naps? Was he beginning to slow down? He thought not. By more or less objective measurements as well as by the envious attitudes of his friends and the reactions of his enemies he still seemed to do as much as ever. Whatever that was worth. But that's another question, one he had no need to face at the moment. Whatever he had been doing all these years, he still did, and now wasn't different from before.

But he would fall asleep. Sudden, sweet, yearning, seductive, peremptory, brief — dozes began. Since he didn't know what to think about them, he didn't think about them much. Till one day he felt, just around the corner of his life, the gentle hubbub of some other life. It was then he began to suspect that he had some other life going on in the other world, the sleep time, the world we casually, wrongly, dismiss as dream. His naps were moments when he was needed Over There.

It was an astonishing, forgiving, consoling, menacing sort of feeling that this notion gave him. Far from doing less and less, he was working more and more, in this world and that.

Everything we perceive, he reasoned, real or not, is equally real to the mind by dint of perceiving it. To hell with Hume. If we perceive it, it's real enough.

But he wasn't perceiving this other life he began to guess he led. Only from the weariness here could he infer his exhausting labors there. Only from the peremptory summons of sleep could he infer the urgent requirements over there. What he was perceiving here was the remembering, remembering the

feel of something else. Something around the corner, just out of sight, the universe like a not very bright star on a winter night, glimpsed from the corner of the eye.

It was like a sound he had heard asleep, gone by the time he woke but the after-resonance still left in his ears. The remembrance of the pressure, the taste a sound leaves behind it.

He tried to talk about this once. His wife looked at him attentively, but said nothing. He felt called upon to say more, and it occurred to him, as a sort of proof of what he was saying, that the onset of napping had more or less coincided with a certain tendency to sleep less at night than he had before. It was as if the work he had somehow committed himself or been sentenced to in that other world still had to be done, no matter how broken or abbreviated his nightly sleep might become. Thus the work had to be undertaken in those moments of napping.

He explained this, and was beginning to think, with alarm, that maybe in fact he had been sentenced to hard labor, suffering, in that other realm. Maybe what religions called Hell was really the place we go every night, and those of us who suffer in hell are those who work hardest there, can barely wake in the morning, barely come back to consciousness after a nap at sunset, when the shadows have grown preposterously, and he had to stand up and go into the kitchen and put something into his mouth and chew it so he would know where he was and what he was.

He was thinking these things while his wife was saying that of course if people sleep less at night they'll take naps in the daytime. Everybody does it.

22 September 2000, Boston