

1-1995

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It is natural to be new. The sun  
a cursor on an ancient instrument,  
slide rule, moves through digits of rain,  
exponents of snow, counting frame, abacus of light

and we think we are simple skin in touch with skin.  
We desire multitudes in every one. We crave  
syenite stability of regal form, we fall  
in love with pattern echo, ambience, mood,

with a shape like your shape, legs crossed, eyes  
serene, forgetting nothing. The intolerable presentness  
we crave. So teach time our tricks—  
be gentil, good Beast, be a circle

not any arrow, be a house and not a river,  
be air and not be fire, be grass, eternal prairie,  
be moon if you please but be close.  
You're only the name of how we go.

1 January 1995

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Towns I sequenced once in deals of pilgriming  
—earth the same color as the sky— fear to go wrong  
a phone booth on an empty shore — then I came to you  
knocking on the language of your door  
until you opened and were private to me — the same  
silence in your clothes, a place like mud,  
winter hurry, to touch without envy,  
to remember without aging — a car starts up—

and a door, isn't it, after all, is simple — North Sea  
and fading light, old man walking crossbred dog —  
mother, you have been good to me — this mood declared  
is all for you, not to say what you have felt or done  
but propose an alternate obsession-of-the-moment  
to the haughty paranoia we call ordinary life.  
Beauty is always like this. It is a deep and fluent thing  
that finds a shore to touch between the light.

2 January 1995

## GAY PEOPLE

What links them is their love of pleasure  
hidden in their own bodies. To know love  
not as a stranger and know all the entrances  
and make life an understanding of the flesh—

that made me love them. We walk in power,  
feeble as we are, we have the wit to see  
through all things (dim as we are), we have the will  
to want a perfect world. Art

is in their hands, it is an organ of their bodies.  
There is not much measure. *If you can see me,*  
*you see enough,* they say. *My pale skin*  
*is all your sky.* I am abashed by their utterance.

3 January 1995

## CIVILIZATION

Bread sticks and some oil and why  
mix austere with opulent,  
you girl, you translator  
of distant suns to this freak soil

o when *will* we be civil? Amérique  
and full of grace, an import sparrow  
bothers the grass now. So much to know,  
so much to do. If we could start

dressing for dinner and have someone bring me  
strong tea in my bed at waking — then  
we would be part of the weather, ducks  
on own pond, almost perfect.

Meantime from mindfulness alone contrive society.

3 January 1995

The blue light  
makes its way  
through the door

the door  
has glass in it  
why must the out  
be in, why  
can we keep

nothing from our lives?

It is because to be ourselves  
we must be everyone.  
We always knew it.  
That's why the light  
is blue.

*for Charlotte*

3 January 1995

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Open stance — hands also spread  
the priest explains the woods:  
Tiw's is this, and this tree Woden's—  
our main wood. Glaze  
my Roman eye, I stagger with desire.

Even here in this hard mistress war  
of wooden limbs and iron phalluses,  
I am too willing to understand. The priest  
sees my yearning and is smug. Land  
answers everyone the same.

*All this  
(I pray) is just for you & I don't even know your name.*

4 January 1995

## WINTER MORNING

A hand reaches inside a robe  
to scratch a chest. I see it  
in the window

faint as a double exposure,  
the snow through it,  
light over the fallen ridgepole

of the dying barn.  
It is mine, the hand,  
the hairs of the chest, the sun.

4 January 1995



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Up there, between Rigel and the Pleiades,  
Aldebaran. Who gave the Arabs  
the sky? Do we use their names  
because the stars were all they had

in the desert, a formal shiver in the sky,  
light shattered into ten thousand names?  
They studied the only movements they could see  
and turned their feelings into Law.

Aldebaran is yellow, Antares red,  
Rigel has a blue intensity,  
a blue foot walking forever in the dark.  
The silt of all our names fills up the night

yet I love you for them, night havens,  
night archives, skin glints of sense  
touched in the dark. A man stooped,  
grasped, rose. And tossed a handful of sand into the sky.

5 January 1995

**Diane McKeon: "What do you think of as your greatest achievement?"**  
**RK: "Nothing comes to mind."**

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As if by measure to impale  
a quiet midnight on a beam of rain

after an interview. Snow. A hand  
reaching out from the mirror.

Bland deli yellow mustard  
lubricious hot dogs juking

dusky interiors of remembered  
cities. Forgive me for bringing it to mind.

It is an image  
left instead of a life.

6 January 1995

## THE ROOTS OF THINGS

Plumb — shall come from lead. Steal  
is not a metal, though, more like a bird—

things make away with themselves by night.  
They say: it is the Gypsies do it, their eyes

a kind of poison,  
don't let them leave their kisses in your cards.

6 January 1995

## AFTER THE EPIPHANY

The kings have come and gone. They saw  
what shone. They left behind them

their bitter experiences, pains,  
wounds, wishes, wants, meek desires

which are all we have to give to one another:  
the gifts. The humiliations. The sense of self.

Strengthened by such serene confusions,  
the child prospers in the cradle among cattle.

Animal utterances also he can understand,  
not so different from what people mean,

made up of *want* and *don't* and *more*.  
But an animal doesn't have much *maybe*.

And that would always be odd about the child—  
a lack of indecision, a kind of stubborn animal willingness

to do what had to be done and forget the law.  
It's your neighbor's beast

trapped in a pit on the sabbath but you  
haul it out. Already you hear the swords

being sharpened.  
Wood of the cross being neatly sawed.

] I once found a Roman nail in England  
so I know what they're like — like ours,

just like us, with point and blunt and a pain to go  
till we are driven up against the wood

and the word is done. The strange life  
he gave us. Fierce fire of love that cannot melt  
even the ice sheathed on this early morning twig.

7 January 1995

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When things live up to their names the world  
is usually in trouble. Wars kill, doors  
slam, I found a nice glass broken in the sink.  
Where do they go, the pieces? When meanings  
proliferate and words are few, the Empire  
is at peace, like cabbage in peaceful dingy rows,  
or heads of dark green curly thick-stalked kale  
bolting up through three feet of snow.

8 January 1995

## BANDITS

Dressing like you have a right to things,  
colloquial. You would never write down:  
“Everything you have is really mine,  
every gate of your body is mine to swagger through.”

But you dress the part. The intricate  
pronouns of the world (antecedents vague,  
relatives proleptic, possessive, concessive)  
you slice through with your cutlass, your Corsican manners,

your Kantian bullshit. You come to town.  
You take the town with you when you go.  
Woe to winter when you come, the hard slush  
of your folkish music, the oil drums

full of your borrowed fire. O the strut  
of you through woods at twilight, the noiseless  
streets of frightened cities waiting for your call,  
the politics! You carved out a self-image

that includes the whole world. Now what can we do  
but join you, bootstrap and bandanna, vanish  
with you in all the snowy shabby gloamings,  
line of footsteps, deer or daughters, lost in woods.

8 January 1995

## WHY THE ACROBAT WAS SMILING

The closeness (*“subrisio saltat.”*)  
as if a skin  
left its man

walk ways, the utter

clangor of her steer, meeting  
(melting)  
this way in the palace.

Fire-thinged,

lax in counsel,  
ruin (ravin)  
minds of a potentate. Or any I

(wait)

and met another, her kind of my kind,  
in a meager park in a damned city so  
among the shadows

(plurality

of the lost) I saw.

They go.

Only an athlete could love them,

just to be in streets

again

(text with a stranger)

cobbled alleys of old  
back of my head.

For I was there

I was a witness  
to the fire (my own desire)

all the way from the drugstore to the opticians  
(records burn



a singular music)

now no one  
knows what I saw.

(Less me, more thee,

o city by a river  
high,

mirror with my skin,  
a bead curtain  
slung aside,

a hip sidling through the atmosphere

and suddenly the whole  
forest bees.

It always depended

how close we got

to the petal,  
rose noise,

giggle of her trampoline.

We feel our way  
along by skin,

no way

to know but touching,  
(no wonder

winter is all thinking.)

9 January 1995

## THREE O'CLOCK

The light so slanted through the window  
comes to explore the long floorboards of  
this little room that wants to write me,

the way places seem intent on doing,  
inscribe themselves in us so ever after  
we postcard of their virtue or their just

being there the way they are. The way  
this is now, late victorious sunlight  
swooping in beneath the clouds

to show nothing but what is and where I am.  
Discover me. I am an accident of light  
prattling of myself again, and made of wood.

9 January 1995

## FRIENDS

Some like to examine their friendships like a cloth just come to light in a drawer. Fabric and pattern, the color and how it suits, the cut and the fit. It looked good on me when it was new. Would I dare to feel the slick remembrance on my naked skin? Others touch it once, and leave it where it is, and smile.

10 January 1995

## THE TRUTH

Light was not meant to frighten us. All I wanted was to see every part of everything, not abstract, just reverent holding and beholding. But once you look you spot all the miracles of treachery. The blind doubt everything too. The only truth is muddle, in between.

10 January 1995

## LOVERS

As beads be  
sewn, suitors  
call, their plaints

telephone,  
their waits  
anguish us

we are on  
call, line strung,  
just elements

of conversation,  
documenders,  
how do we fall

in love? Queer  
eves and ample  
wakings do it,

then we bend,  
the noonday arrow  
of no one home,

the lover's  
bricabrac  
analysis:

she who is  
all and none  
for me, she's

the tool I choose  
to hurt me best,

my alkahest

where I solve  
meaningless  
anxieties

to tuneful woe,  
magic pain,  
amazing sin.

11 January 1995

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Let me look back in the era, the zero,  
the iron, the *Meinung*, the lifted up  
contrition of a world born warring.  
Let me mumble nimble — a car  
is just a lightless star careening  
down from Mulholland into your part of town.  
The forest. The ruling coalition  
never yields its power. A friend's hip  
(a friendship), sweet razz  
matazz of partying through dawn  
and there are whole seconds where your synapses  
get lost along the way. We'll never  
know what happened but we loved it.  
We love it. Indigo shadows in an empty bed.  
A cello in the other room is telling lies.

11 January 1995  
Rhinebeck