

4-1995

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Ambisextrous or lustrously the shimmer rain  
investigates the last hour of daylight. We know  
something will come of this, we have worked hard  
to get to this slippery Friday. Tail lights tell us.

But now the careful hour comes, called Happy,  
when we investigate each other, just like the rain,  
touching, licking, being shrugged off. Think  
of all the damp bar towels left after everybody went home.

6 April 1995

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Taking stand on it. A complex Dakota: hide  
in the topology itself, number is just an accident  
of the way things fold. You are safe there,  
silent as sunlight on a shadeless rock.

They even see you but don't have hands.  
Austerity, waterless for hours. Not even  
that blue smoke men used to drink. A cave  
or overhang, like an old man's recollection

of a prayer he used to say when he was young,  
a child really, before the world got too dry for praying.  
Memory shelter. You think you hear birds, but why?  
What did you ever do that a bird should  
pass the time of day with you or sing?

7 April 1995

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A face  
in masonry

an expression  
—almost

a meaning—  
left

when the builders  
finished piling up

mortaring and the white  
rough wash

in this world every  
thing wants to be

bone every bone  
wants to speak.

7 April 1995

## LES DEVINETTES D'EPINAL

Everything we look at  
asks those strange questions.  
Here is the cat where is the rat,  
how many Arabs are hiding in this tree.  
Here is the hunter where is the duck.  
And how can this one face  
be two? (Upside down  
je est un autre)

it is what we grew up with  
that questions us, anything we see,  
nothing doesn't ask.  
Snow in April, bizarre empacements  
of the blue flowers in the first green of lawn,  
what is wrong with this picture?  
(My father in Frank's Place, looking  
slyly at the mysteriously prim  
trim waitress he called  
Mona Lisa because she would not  
smile at him. Or do more than smile.)

8 April 1995

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That takes the cake, we said, meaning the crust  
mostly, somebody's nerve, to do something  
just a bit beyond, and get away with it (they  
have the cake, are eating it even now, messy  
tableknives illicitly licked clean of fudge and  
angel crumb, corners of their shapely lips  
defiled with icing, cappuccino scum, cinnamon).  
Where do they get the nerve to act like that?  
We in our soggy lakeside afternoons, stoned  
on sheer propriety, would never think of doing  
anything so bold (except maybe in croquet,  
badminton, or with one's cousin, behind the garage,  
but you're both so nervous it doesn't count.  
Or counts as sex or sin, maybe, but not as boldness.  
The brassy way they do the things they do.

8 April 1995

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Time capsule we need the report  
elongated destinies weave in us—  
again and again the brain abducts us—  
there is *a small gateway in there*  
*to a largefold* more than molecular  
*kingdom leads*  
*and thither we are rapt from this*

dyslexic creatureverse we dwell.  
Take as transitive what is not—  
things do us,

and we happen them.

The gate

I guess is simple, rock-built,  
weeds round it, rushes, dental sounds  
clicking or dithering.

[d, t, ð, þ]

Hurrying through high grasses  
begging for breath. As if  
by telling anything you told the truth.

9 April 1995

## *NAUFRAGE*

At Damietta the old man's jaunty cap  
—patent leather bill and a gold ship's wheel—  
kept him from seeing what we all saw:  
a book opening amidships and a sky  
coming out of it that overran our sky  
—like a dawn making? All he saw  
was brightness, but it was always bright.  
Biplanes fluttered down the new sky,  
just hatched. He rubbed his eyes,  
palming them gently as Huxley advises,  
to see if this world of things to see  
would change or go away. Boats creak on divots.  
We are safe, or at least we have a chance,  
the sun so fierce on the bill of the old man's cap.

10 April 1995



## **EARTHWORD**

Then they were trespass  
in shamelight the docks  
unemptied blue cargo  
she asked What  
is outrage the green  
language books bleat

nothing has  
the meaning of its means  
threaded filament of,  
othercolor. Robe  
russetly. No other  
language knows this.

10 April 1995

## **KATA IQNANNHN 11:55**

Handy anguish— to Paschal tone you die on  
high, a never sent parley. Is he a rose or lumen?  
Ache this core, jasper or topaz, kind of  
agnostic ocean he owed us.

10 April 1995

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are there, not coming  
not there long, not gone  
able to nowhere

and yet this minute

fills the mouth  
no room for breath  
breath is any other

between one  
and the next  
the whole of it is

nothing but all of it.

11 April 1995

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Edge by basin —bastion of that mystery deity  
They found in the desert— for whose unsearchable benefit  
They filled with warm blood —ever-flowing from the slaughter floor  
Before their Temple— of beasts and birds —no one can count them—  
The smoldering basins (my old book spelled it so) of brass  
All day long. Cows bulls ewes rams goats doves.

*Gone from me the blood that wore me in that life,  
Gone from me the grunting name I knew, the nuzzling mate of me.*

And of course all those millions (over the years) of slaughtered ones  
Were reborn as the children (grand, greatgrand, so on forever)  
Of those who slew them. Somewhere in all this killing and being born  
God hid, or was hidden, a puff of wind in the oily smoke  
Drifting down the valley, a cry from a bird — unclean bird, who fed  
(Like us, now, briefly, mortal, here) on what priests left

12 April 1995

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Wordy age, or are they answers  
Everybody gives? This body gives.  
Enough ink in this bone  
to write me a letter, dear—  
here, take it in your lips  
and verb, and count to ten,  
and I'll be done, like willows  
on the fens, or white cottages  
under black bare trees, nightfall  
in middle April, the sky  
all verdigris and cream—  
shutters banging in the wind.  
Put in everything you mean  
(whether or not you mean  
to say it to me) and say it to me.  
I am the sink for all your silver,  
I am tarnish, I am that curious  
ancient masculine rose,  
a thorn to know you. This pen  
has been everywhere. It knows  
the sun that only shines in caves,  
at midnight, burning paper,  
the broken Kentucky mile stones,  
the Plymouth with bronchitis, the grease  
they smear their hands with  
and wipe their thick hair. Wordage,  
virgin anecdotes, a woman in tears  
looks through your window.  
She has seen the Emissary Goat  
buckle in the wilderness and die  
—between one drink and the next—  
sometimes the air has better  
things to do than breathe me.

So tell me all you can make up  
about me, it will be truer than I am.  
We meet for matter, and take it all  
back inside this military mind.  
Conquistador, you overknow me!

12 April 1995

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Into the cave  
where they've been waiting  
all whose while  
a piece of paper

signed with stars —we rearrange  
the alphabet— there is snow  
under certain oak leaves still—  
I found myself thinking all afternoon  
of the rue du Faubourg St Denis, just at the old gate,  
just at midnight, all the girls  
going up and down the stairs—  
and far away near l'Étoile the ambassador  
falls asleep as his portrait is painted.

13 April 1995

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In the series of instructions  
constantly received  
or am I a name on a sun lawn  
forgiving a rill only spring can fill  
fadingly or feather

numbered to be sleeping  
dreadwake a cup  
full of scenarios  
the chatter in my  
head outrages

wherefore I have mailed the sea  
to my own dark mailbox  
gravel studded with blue flowers  
a kind of grass.

14 April 1995



**COSMOPOLITAN INTERLUDE**

Can a picture ever love me?  
Who is this cloth?  
Clerk of the town  
a busy archivist,  
humble me to long paper,  
I was born from your word.

All flesh becomes  
an annalist of her smiles.

14 April 1995

## ASHLEY'S MAN HOLDING A BALLOON

He is not small, is not tall,  
a man-sized man

holding a predictable balloon.  
He thinks: holding a red balloon

is like holding onto a woman.  
She wants to be gone, she is full

of going, she wants to be sky.  
He holds tighter

as his thought gets wronger.  
Vaguer. He wants her

like a prayer, a big soft round easy  
prayer full of helium words and everywhere.

Will the air itself  
get tired of him and let the red

balloon expire, one lone lover's  
dented valve go leaking down.

And a bad lover at that.  
Not like the sky, always full of destinations.

And maybe the earth will get tired  
of all his thick entitlements and push him up

with his stupid bag of gas, with his idea  
of a woman, with whatever he's so busy thinking

up into the perfect April sky.  
We are locked in eternal ignorance.

14 April 1995

## THE HOUR OF THE SOLDIER

It is Good Friday, the clouds  
are practical, some shield,  
some menace, some rain down.  
It is earth again, the dying place.

The *crown* of the High Priest  
measures creation when he puts it on.  
The *veil* of the Temple  
is torn from top to bottom,  
a skirt ripped open by its knees.

Abominably nearby, a man  
bends all his body up to grab a breath,  
collapses, arches up again and falls.  
Three hours it will go on like that  
until whatever a body is or makes it move  
gives out. The ghost is gone.

This is the hour of the soldier. He stands  
looking up at this latest triumph  
in the smallest, oldest war. We all  
are soldiers. We see worse than this  
every afternoon. Why am I crying?

14 April 1995

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I don't know why you'd care to know it  
but there are goldfinches on the feeder again  
and a lawn full of blue flowers.

I, who am ten thousand years old,  
still have a lot to say about myself, and how yellow  
they are, and bring it all to you,

bird by word by flower. Just let me talk,  
we have been doing it so long,  
one day we'll get it right.

15 April 1995

## GETTING MARRIED IN POLO COUNTRY

*for Sol and Monica*

I was thinking about you today,  
what it means to get married and the country,  
I didn't get it all figured out but I got something.  
Because I was walking along alone  
in a huge meadow with the mountains over there  
and a ravine full of acorns north down the slope,  
grey trees, none of the noisy business of spring yet,  
nobody has been here for weeks or years,  
and I lay back against a curiously bent beech tree and watched  
nothing in particular, but watched it closely,  
for a long time. And I wished you  
what I wish I could give everybody in the world,  
namely a meadow, some no-account trees at the end of it,  
an empty meadow with new lush grass and some sun  
and some cloud and it's empty, it's empty,  
everybody has one, stretches straight as starlight  
out in front of her, in front of him, a private meadow  
no matter how much craziness is going on,  
just close your eyes and it's in front of you,  
just keep walking, just keep your eyes on emptiness.  
I know we fall in love for each other, I know  
we go and get married for the sake of the world,  
and I know that what we need are spaces,  
meadows and trees and edges, edges, music  
is made of edges, but edges are made of meadows.

15 April 1995