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What we really are (be careful,
Biblical, polite) is masters
Of taxonomy. How this
Relates to that, and how we call

That relationship
Of a thing to itself — names,
As if we were (we are not,
Be careful) masters of identity.

“Nomenclature is its own reward,”
Says Ashbery not quite smiling.
What happened to me wasn't
Careful — faith overwhelmed decorum

Like a red fence in an unmown meadow.
Or really just a Sunday morning lawn,
We are not masters of such property
As that estate (the fifth?)

Called real. What we really are
Is headcolds wandering through the dictionary
Trying to sneeze. What we own
Is a curious wet impulse to be now.

10 May 1995

AUTHORITY

Make an allowance for inexperience, desire,
playfulness, hanging out in the park, call it
what you like: a bridge over narrows, a graveyard
to play in, a hip to touch so shyly the sky
won't notice, a blond funeral, a bright day.
A priest's mind full of worship is, I dress
to look like you, we are tatters, dresses and neckties
flourish in sea wind, something goes
in all this staying. How fond we are
of what cannot be said! We praise Chinese
for elegant entymemes in poetry, as if leaving
things out were a kind of jade. We value.
And as long as we do, things will haunt us,
colors will be our zombies and nobody at peace,
western hills in an orange world. Eternal perils
of connoisseurship, of getting what you want!
She dove for sponges and brought one home—
this also had a kind of life as intricate as ours
though seemingly less in love with travel.
Does that mean less fulfilled? Only the ocean
knows for sure, and it's too busy telling
to make any sense. We live among skeletons,
in other words, and wear on our skins
what other people wore as theirs before.
I would rest my case here if I were making one,
but as it is the far flat Baltic blue corrodes
the patient horizon of our smug attention.
However small it is, a lake gets out of hand,
and each thing eludes us, we chase it down the nights
and wake up shouting at its dwindling shadow
You child of cobalt and potassium!

11 May 1995

1.
How old can one be and not know it?
The interference in the circuit comes
from fine weather. Inside, there are bands,
Bersaglieri bands outside, the shine
of sound!

2,
 Discovery Day parade
and my skin even glistens in rainlight.
*Come touch me now, the rain says,
for I am plurivocal, meditative,
thought-composting, gleety-sweet,
you need so much to be every
and I am one thing only, wet
writing on your skin.*

11 May 1995

after Juvenal

I never walked down your street
or listened to the music you call yours.
I have no brother, and that is ordinary.

In your detestable obedience to ads
I find the corruption of our whole society.
You and you alone must bear the blame:

you thought that drugs would ease it,
that cars could drive you away from it,
you thought that music could dim the day.

You have spoiled it all, you and you
alone. Loud and empty, mean
and very frightened — that is you.

And now what is to be done? You
have to do it, and nobody else.
You chose an attitude instead of physics,

a grimace instead of a work.
Now what to do? You have to do it.
Turn everything off and begin again.

12 May 1995

No moon in what I say.
Sick man shoots straight.

Head spins like revolver—
I fire at echoes.

Things laugh at us by breaking.
How many springtimes must a man endure?

12 May 1995

The shelter

Examine the shelter. It is a language
spoken only by people you love.

Most of them
love you right back. Its roots are in the meadows
that turn boggy in the spring. It flows or runs
depending on the altitude, or that rare
canter of the heart called acclivity,
down through the inhabited places busily
naming things. Flocks of Dorset sheep,
shapes of children's wigwams to sleep in
half under the sky and half in an old book
by Cooper or Parkman, with wildness in it
but not too wild.

It is a language
that knows its place —skin, collar,
lip, alveolar ridge, breath, gullet—
and knows that any language's chief enterprise
is somehow to make secret what it discloses.
Protect us all from easy knowing. Towns
have codes to deal with things like that,
how early you can mow your lawn, and with
what kind of instrument. And is it the Sabbath?
Have the camels you counted on come
caravaning back yet? And how does the bank
look today? Examine the shelter,
the glorious word-lists you made out
when you were reading Giraudoux. Have you
or anybody ever learned all those words yet?
Daytime is a foreign language, surely—
we'll get things right when the sun stops jabbering.

[wið]

13 May 1995

MORNING RUMORS

By the elegant confusions we extract from Byzantine nights
Flown from those porphyry shadows firelight fashions deep
In the folds of ordinary bodies, creases, furrows, yields—
Those intimate glories we so incessantly believe—
We know that we have come to the right city. Domes inside us
Match the scrappy plain outside when dawn has come.
All of this got imagined in the dark. Really by the dark,
For what did I have to do with it, me with my seeing and hearing
And wanting, so much wanting, just a sky uneasy with birds.
It made itself inside me, we claim. But the police don't listen.
They are not here to forgive us. They stand with some dignity
As if to remind us of the better class of emperors we once had,
Awkward with rectitude on the noisy piazza. Day is a drag.
Everything is what it is, and that's not much. Handcuffs
Glitter at their hips, ready for the dangerous body of the other.
It starts to move through the mortal crowd, my head
Is in my hands, I have listened to the statues too long,
I don't understand this crowded philosophy they're murmuring
Now between the seal pool and the ferris wheel.
The rocks themselves were brought here to deceive.

13 May 1995

COMMONPLACES

The cold gives way. On the margin
of the town square a comment's made
about some passing daughters. Sonship
is harder than fatherhood.

Try

to see nothing. Sons grow older and weaker,
fall back into becoming fathers.
Sonship is hard. The visible distracts.
It is with you in another way, talentless,
anxious, old. Everybody knows everything.

Middleaged businessmen teach children
how to be young. Buy this.

Rachel quand

du Seigneur one sings, forgetting
such music is illicit now. Upstairs
my wife is coughing. What weather
we have had in us!

Poor waterfowl

to stagger down such vacant skies.

The nerve
of finding the city,
old sow
asleep on sward,

beech leaves new
barely green
so light they are.

It is a nerve, a specific axon
by which a city aligns with cosm.
When that nerve is well supplied
it keeps the world in place, that nerve
is the "capital of the whole"—

Paris has been invaded, occupied
but never sacked, never bombed to rubble
though its own rulers pithed and pitted it
in the days of the Commune — only the city
ever burnt the city, unlike London,
Berlin, Moscow, even
Eternal Rome.

Is a nerve a nave?

The τεμενος still seems to be the only
sacred way, a bound or bounded place, a faring held inside, a lawn
made safe by sheer defining.

Paris in whatever danger
closes in on itself,
becomes again its magic island in Sequana,
city/island. The Holy Chapel.

It is after all
early Sunday morning
and the music's dated,
my eyes have worn away
with seeing
less than there is to be seen.

Men who have had a certain
fortune with good women
mourn at times in the bottom
of their hearts for an amity
they have never known
or dared let themselves know—
brotherhood and to a haunted
praise of the missing
comrade / heart's friend you hear
such beautiful estrangement
as poured by Verdi in his
maturer operas or

old enemy
give me

at last
your hand.

Or Eléazar in *La Juive* could give
what seems his daughter to the fire
but not to men, preferred to see her slain
than known, the way we know
things in our days and call them by name.

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice,
can that be His will? Can that be done?

Glottal stop
among the prairies
or by the Wolf River
one green evening
knew her absolute

or at Le Havre
or

Fishcamp
at the hidden gates
of Yosemite

or Fécamp
at the gates of rain.

14 May 1995

More ground-ivy than
ever before. Ever
means my current
slice of this eternity.

The broad expostulations
of the hosta leaves
get ready for their
purple arguments.

No flags on the iris
flagpole yet. But our
lilacs, *nos lilas*,
small, still tentative

suddenly abound.
How can the spindle
support the dense
sprays of color?

How can a newborn filly walk?

15 May 1995

Old men get white hair
because they are moving away from the sun

and reach the moon—
the pole of pure manhood

stripped bare of trying.
A bone, but not to do.

15 May 1995

There is by wondering
an only we can find

silence round me
is my instrument
my better skin

you touch with yours.

16 May 1995

THE VISTA

Saint skirt and olive
mandolin her
hair let down

lay down across the rock
became the tawny
view of far places

beneath my hands.
Eyes closed, I touch
the small steeple of Seytroux.

16 May 1995

SUPPOSITIONS RETURN TO HAUNT

Imagine hair. And all at once
the color of it fastens, and the cat-glint or
dog-dull of it, the ferret fume of it or clean
and your mind breathes in deep.
Try to hate someone while thinking of their hair—
not the coiffure or haircut but the hair
itself, curly wiry limp beneath your gaze,
so close, you are so close to their hair,
an inch away, your focus soft, the scalp in sight,
and under that the bone beyond which
they go on being who they are, the god they are,
the curtain of the Temple shivers, you are close
to the fountain of our first identity,
no room for hate here, no room for love,
just awe and terror and the faint whisper of shampoo.

17 May 1995

We are begotten of this indifference—
maid or man, our marrying is void

because we wed the shadow of our will,
the shade that moves the chairs around the house

and waits for us in the empty bed.

18 May 1995

IF

If you can stop
thinking
you can start thinking.

18 May 1995

Of all the things I could be thinking
why am I thinking this?
In dumbness mute I ope'd a book
and saw it was philosophers at war
where each speaks ill of other's truth.

18 May 1995

One here is
at the center

which is ever
a center of

and that *of*
is all our grief

and botany,
lobes

of love uncurled
to touch

and be blinded
by, the scent

of lilies of the valley
heavy nearby

the color of sky
after rain

a religion
meekly

of what we feel
one is here

at the center
of feeling

'but how does
one' actually

'feel?' The war
as ever lifts

shrapnel of
memory quick

over us all
and lets it fall.

18 May 1995

But why am I asking this? And not that?
That is a cat you dreamed about last night,
West Coast, cats on stanchions perched
among the books, for sale, and we not buy.
We go home now. In the East are many cats.
The harbor fills up with ships. The coast
worked by storms is loud with seals. But why this?

This is a dream you underwent, and underground
we were in some duress. I wish I had dreams
I said and you said No you don't. As if a dream
were harder than the day — the day at least
knows that night is coming, relief and Morpheus.
The dream knows nothing. Only this.

18 May 1995

ISIS

And who will bring
the woman's
nody together?

Worn out
with all her mending
all her finding

finding the parts of him
and refabricating
from ruin

till he is gold
in the blue of godhead,
who

will gather her
still young,
who lifts her veil
in every flower

dainty as toadstool
fresh up after rain
she lifts her veil

who will unite
the uniter? Who will
heal her body
worn with healing?

Still young she lifts
everywhere
her veil
we heal by heeding.

19 May 1995