

12-1995

## decE1995

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## THE WORDACHE

She was speaking in summer  
in Hungarian dark,  
explaining

that serious business of the eye  
(*everyone who sleeps is beautiful* — Whitman)  
decode a single world

what is spoken becomes your fate,  
fate follows language,  
is its shadow,

2.

on Church's Beach the immense blocks  
of granite  
(is it? granite is a word)

we leap from one to the next  
following the shore  
around to mid-June

where the gaudy  
yellow sea-poppies make their home  
and you are with them.

3.

And an old man with no arm  
is selling red  
paper poppies

buddy-poppies of November  
under the el on Fulton.  
I am frightened of his beery smell,

the grizzle on his chin  
not so different from mine now  
as I sit in a far country

guessing their secret names.  
He is my uncle and my father  
now he is me.

War made us sleep,  
in sleep we fall afoul of the law,  
and waking's liberty.

4.  
That we can speak, can talk  
my way into tight corners,  
cleft of the rock

where at sunset (or: as sunset)  
the seductive purple shadows  
propagate restless alternatives

to all I am.  
My head aches with liberty.  
*drawing a bead* on the heart

inside the walls of you  
I take my case.  
Will I dare tell you what I was dreaming

into the dark of what only happens  
this hollow word  
shaped like a life?

5.  
A word is the visible

intersection of events.  
He stores his heart

safe in oak  
cleft of a tree  
the wind sings

over it  
to silence all that waking  
the leaves are so busy with,

the pain hidden as language,  
even as another language—  
this analysis

called poetry,  
from *poetria*, from *poiein*, making,  
making the best of it.

6.  
A man woke up and told his dream,  
something you know you don't know,  
a room of your house you never knew was there,

the headache, undreamt, spontaneously  
arose with waking. And the dream he told  
was gone. The pain did all the dreaming now.

7.  
Cyclone cellar,  
hummingbirds  
in azure wind  
  
wound up from

Inca fairways  
bombarding

comes memory  
scattering lascivious  
details—

We lived through  
even the words.

8.  
You can't see a thing up the streets in our head.  
Grand Concourse jammed with who are they  
and the Yankees won again

before Justine goes out for chopped beef  
I gaze past her satin breast  
to the endless streets into the unknown city

we're worried that her husband will come home  
to find the one I thought I was, here,  
But I was no one, and here is far,

the furthest of all our places is here.

24 June 1993 / 26 April 1994  
23 December 1995

## THE AIR

The air  
is warm enough  
to breathe  
if you care  
about breathing

just barely  
and the snow  
a little tamed  
by one day  
hovering at freezing  
a few hours

before the cold  
deepened, air  
thinned  
and here you are  
good morninging  
every blessed thing  
you hope and the trees  
move not

no air  
sculpts them  
into action,  
branch and twig  
go on as usual  
with their motionless  
Chinese

the air  
amazes  
with quietness  
is it always  
like this  
beneath my fuss

trying still  
to read this.  
How can I talk  
if no wind  
speaks?

And then a chill  
little breeze  
investigates the quince,  
twigs shimmer  
like the stars  
when I look to hard  
straight up

what we have to say  
must be spoken  
from the corner  
of the eye  
the wind  
lets it, the air

the ordinary air  
is green  
with everything we mean.

24 December 1995

## UNIVISION

The Pope's last Mass  
it said in me,  
his old hands,  
an old priest who had once  
been the bitterest of lovers  
touches shaky the diamond and the gold  
this chalice the white  
bread he had more firmly lifted.

And after the bread and after the wine?  
What secret transformations of old midnight  
wander the marble nave, the decent crowd  
from everywhere, in their costumes, clean,

praying out loud, watching, watching  
as we do at home, hearing someone talk  
interminably in Spanish, over  
the Pope's old Latin, the Pope's  
old hands for an hour the center of the world.

25 December 1995



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Glumes by churchyard prompt a rood of hay  
— we smell it on warm days  
as if the mowing had gotten stuck in the cloth of the world

and we breathe in —  
clear mounts and milk weather.  
What I want to offer you today  
is the recollected mountains.  
Blue haze purified with snows  
a week ago were thick in trees  
and now just under, mottled  
seemscape and no jury ponders

Andean weaving. The patience  
fabulous of mountains and the frivolous  
spendthrift wastrel wanderment of clouds.  
All that water is for me.  
And I'll go laughing  
into the north roads of a bleak island  
until I get there,  
                        on the other side of weather  
and be the silliest of all. Nothing ends easy.

25 December 1995  
Boston

## CLARET TULIPS

So the tulips are here in front of me  
and I am an idle ghost this morning,  
I died in the night the way a simple  
sifting of snow came down and covered  
all the shiny cars. Through the windshields  
only a furry sort of light. Then nothing.

But the tulips are still here. I see them  
having nothing to do with me. A vision  
of deep Iranian purples, a smack of honey,  
one sword-blade leaf has sagged, the others  
go on defying whatever struck me down.

26 December 1995  
Boston

- O L O G Y

Divisible by three, the human brain  
is not content with sluggish electricity  
but moves by way of Galactic Interzonance  
to connect its wastrel member, me, its  
Portugal / Spain demarcation twixt  
the thing called body and the guess called soul

and God is a parasite trapped inside our thought.  
Neither flesh nor energy, this brittle thing,  
this thinking is a shadow of past times.  
A thought is a shadow of history. Thinking  
is an animal tethered to remembering  
who runs fast and no further than the rope allows  
woven of everything he's ever done and been and thought before.

By three means I and it and me. The wedding party that is our life,  
drunk and always wanting to be dancing and proclaiming,  
kissing this and that, eating and cheering on the hired band  
till finally the bride and groom wave and dance and slip away  
to the dark nuptials we call honey and call moon  
and with their passing (he is I and she is me)  
we carry on our frolicking no longer. And this is dying.

26 December 1995  
Boston

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The surgery of elementary principles  
begins usually with jam — you like cherry  
they like marmalade, before the morning's done  
there is politics to reckon with, a colony  
of nascent hatreds, a Balkan breakfast.  
Morality arises from the senses. Don't kiss  
me like that! as you might say to an aunt  
or That skin is reserved for love  
a better kind than aunts and uncles know  
you think. Blood relations are the worst of it.  
The family agony. The loathsome  
preferences. The way they do it. Hate  
watched the way they chew, I've seen it,  
they stare at me also, waiting for my head  
to topple from my shoulders or my eyes explode.  
Nothing more beautiful than a winter morning,  
a shimmer of snow mist on the hill  
and not too many birds. You empty window.

27 December 1995  
Boston

## A ROOM FULL OF PEOPLE PLAYING SOLITAIRE

Just tell me anything, that's poetry enough for me,  
sound of your breath, licking your lips. The word.  
What does a word mean. What do I understand.  
Epic between top lip and the lower. Lady.  
Burnt cards of identity. Erase tattoo.  
Insert a sliver of silver dura mater  
morning thorny moony theory.

All the wounds  
of soldiers. We are just armies. Officers.  
Raptacious dragomans. New Age assistant  
I trusted every word but she not me  
or mine. Whereby an altercation prompt,  
a snug disaster. Far from bed, in blue  
Armenian uplands. Speaking a non-  
Aryan language, having a stone, a stone  
and a tower and no town. Being glad.  
Let me alone with my hulled wheat.

Words secretly mean the opposite of what you mean.  
In her lap as she lay idly listening  
autumn leaves by their own power happened  
to accumulate, strange thing to see, I wrote  
to all the papers but only my heart listened.  
Lady. No one lets me call out any more.  
Name all the flags you can, there's always another,  
burgee of the tiniest yacht club or some stone  
in the water penguins live on and six shepherds  
with a seventh waiting to be king.

O god our time  
in nations past, all our sweet ceremony  
our lofty beeswax and a woman waiting!  
All you are is obstacle and flow. And she  
beside me answering the call of a candle.

No one hears the thing you mean. They all  
hear the Judas shiftings in the words themselves,  
so deep inside you they perform for you alone  
but neglect to mean. Controlled environment  
maybe like the Rainforest in the Boston Zoo  
where African jungle birds roam the air with me,  
zipping through the squawking trees above me  
and the world is warm. But out there  
outside this little steamy busy world  
you think you mean, giant winter's waiting  
and snow is on the dome these screaming red  
billed ibises ascend to and swoop down  
over slumbering gorillas.

That's how words mean,  
all inside the head it's neat and keen and outside  
nothing means. So much for reason.  
There is something about the way men stand  
when they come in especially in winter,  
talking their way out of their overcoats  
all words and faces and no bodies at all.  
When will we inherit this body we inhabit?

Men! Idlers invented by novelists to explain  
the hope of heaven in a woman's lap  
but it all is night and silence  
broken between us like a jar of honey.  
The flag had purple in it, and gold.  
The girl told a story about peasants,  
pigeons, tulips, fences, hiding  
from your mother, motor oil, crossing  
a little stream, getting wet,  
making one or two interesting mistakes.

28 December 1995  
Boston

## DAWN IN BOSTON

Before the news is known the sky relents  
—I lived dissolute so long the blush of dawn  
still feels like a reproach — and there the paper is  
full of ordinary agony.

Too quiet to think.  
The sky is pink.  
The air is cold and still  
I will wait for what is thought

to know me,  
quiet me into speech.

Two blocks away the red and green lights play.  
I think of all the bars at dawn  
empty, remembering nothing  
of all that angry music.  
Empty streets, hope hurrying  
to tie its shoes.

The illogic of going on  
is our liberty.

Faced with dawn, no wonder I'm too happy to work.

A lute in winter  
waiting for Leipzig  
sparrowhawks. Forty-eight  
crows in and out of one tree  
in fluid passage, loud  
over this street.

I will go out and feed the world  
calligraphies of oil,  
the fire cached in seed,

the scatter. Rhombus.

Trapezoid. Cube.  
Eventually we lift off from the surface,  
it's an Egyptian launch, everything  
leaves Earth with me, everything I am  
turns into stone and glass and fire, fire  
frittering away the sky  
like a drunkard wasting one more day.

29 December 1995  
Boston



## WE WILL TURN THIS SMALL WORLD ROUND

How dust is power, decay is color—  
watch the paltry desires once invested grow  
to be a sky that hides the sky,  
a liner for reality and we are polymer.

Because I talked big. And the woman  
listening hearkened to what I meant, alas,  
not what I said, and so belonged like me  
to the community of the conspiracy,

the secret garden, hidden from ourselves as well,  
that sends us into politics. Too late  
the plausible analysis of anchormen.

One drifts because one must. Where compulsion  
*turns into desire*. Must is lust. Until you do  
the whole surface of reality turns green  
and threatens you with April time after time.  
How good it would be to do it without wanting to.

30 December 1995

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If we were not born children. Parents. A father  
is not just an authority or judge or nourisher or loss.  
He is a universe inside of which you grow.  
He is like weather. The child is a parasite  
born and borne inside the large body of the parents,  
all its life it struggles to be free of them and to return.  
Nothing is natural. We are not after all a part of nature.  
Only our bodies are natural. But they are born so premature  
we need the womb-world of the parents to survive at all.  
Growing out of nature back to our natureless reality  
when we are alone and beautiful and the other side of terror.

30 December 1995

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A thing, being somewhere, touches everywhere  
by hard continuity. If you change the size of what you see  
the little café in Sunset where we drank espresso  
—but most people didn't, tisanes  
for them and herbal horrors, sweet, oh I  
am all perfect and an ooze of honey —

becomes a kind of Venice. Americans  
become civilized and quiet and travel  
looking and understanding and keeping their peace.  
Just don't say a word. Press my knee  
under the table, press the leg if necessary,

keep firm touch with flesh and thing. Don't speak.

30 December 1995

## THE LIVING ROOT OF US

The ground itself is food in which they stir  
upwards and sideways and silent, a growing  
that is all changing, *something of that*  
*becomes something of this,*

the assimilation

nation, the dark  
birds that flies through the earth.

(On the fifth day of Snow-month  
they celebrate the circumcision of Christ—  
let him be the last so tortured, first  
of all the ways He died for us.)

The bird flies in me too,  
an upward effrontery to know,  
a passion over the eyes  
feels like a headache,

sound of water

gushing, later dripping, later still.  
The ice replied by being vast,  
a continent pressed down beneath it, the bird  
flies through it too but flies very slow.  
My eyes blink in snowlight,  
I shield my seeing against what is seen,

o life you are so choosy  
and the bird is stirring, spiral after spiral  
rising like a hawk towering  
till it comes to the uplands of my head  
and hurts there, and hunts,  
and hunts until it finds  
and kills all that it discovers  
and that killing is called Thinking.

(The night before, the anthers on all  
indoor flowers are delicately prodded

and yield a special timely pollen — grey,  
gold, greeny-yellow, russet, all  
depending — with which they spike their wines.  
This annual alcohol unleashes honesty  
and all night people do as they desire,  
saying the truth of things, their silly feelings,  
and in the morning nothing's left to remember,

since memory is only awareness of what is missing,  
no memory can exit when desire's sleeping,  
and all that flower wine annihilates  
every wanting by fulfilling it. And then  
the midnight comes and Time comes back  
roaring and lecherous and all the sweet  
peace of drunkenness is past. One wakes  
sober in a hungry-headed world.)

Then the bird rests.  
It is blue  
in me  
today.  
The shape  
of my desire  
is a plum today,  
a Japanese white radish,  
a mango, a gourd  
from Oaxaca, a cup,  
anywhere a cup,

There is a moment when we wait for what we know  
when the word that says it will not come.  
In the cry that is the night  
I cried out without waking  
I need a ... and then You need a ...  
and could not find the word  
you said, you heard me crying loud  
a need that knew no name  
or I couldn't find the word in the dark,

that all was waiting.  
Then the bird began to move, soar, its shadow

also is called thinking,  
the shadow of a bird is not always,  
not always shaped like a bird,  
it is made by the shape of what it touches,

sometimes it is a fish an ocean a flower sometimes  
a man a hungry exile foraging among the thinkable,

and this shadow, passing, passing, is all we know of thinking.

(Throughout the next day, it is considered very good luck to cross the thresholds of an many houses as possible. You must stay long enough inside each dwelling to speak and listen, to eat and drink something. The first place you visit that day is called the Sign of the House, and it is especially potent as an omen, indicating your purpose and activity throughout the oncoming year. When there, drink milk or water, taste rice or wheat. Usually it snows. The fields all the way from river to mountains are white and even with it, the trees are remarks, idle pleasantries dimly overheard in someone else's party. It is all white. Far away it might be an animal that is moving, like a deer or a horse or the shadow of a big bird.)

The bird has gone now.  
For a little while nothing bothers the white mind.  
Underneath the obvious earth, the hard  
work of preparation goes on all winter long.  
The visible sleeps while the invisible works.  
Everything is ready and soon we will eat.

31 December 1995