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Being here at all
is love
and love's chief operation
is connection

of which this local network
is our standard and love's banner
scarlet with our staying

jeweled net of
the names we say,
those colors of the mind
that let us endure almost
love's intolerable light.

1 January 1994

for Charlotte, at New Years

I ask the shadows to come back sometimes.
For their clothes sake, I like their clothes
bought in such far markets, the young
women in Amsterdam wind scarves around their mouths,
Nepali boys in sky-blue zipper jackets, the Brooklyn nuns
magpie-quick and starched with certainties o
clack of their waist-worn giant rosaries as they prowl,
Talmudists with white shirts and no neckties
shouting on the subway intimate commentaries
fingers jabbing at subtle points in absent texts,
we carry it all with us, Bible and Baedeker,
there is no empty intersection. Or for the sake of one
we young in glamorous rags swallowed blue sugar
in hopes of an hour out there without coordinates.
But language went ever at our sides
slanging each new world— Demon lover!
Rose and mandolin, duck and roe! Snug cummerbund
of treasonable diplomats! Ice cream!
It all comes back to loving what you wear,
the sleek or woolen names of you. Only there
sometimes comes the hope of lucid silence,
shape of your mouth speaking, words
veiled by the beauty of you speaking.

1 January 1994

D E P E N D S

It depends, doesn't it,
on how much you try.
Otherwise there would be
no going in your go,

just a dead door and a shadow
moored to the viburnum.
You'd have to listen
hard to the clouds

and even then your clothing
would settle round your body
hopelessly concealing
what you thought you had to show.

And no one (this
is the bitter kindness of things)
would mind. They
were no travelers too.

2 January 1994

THE MISSIONARY

I am giving you a yellow piece of cardboard
that folds up to make a little printed box
with a slit in the top to catch your pennies
to support my field work in this pagan world.

It will take pesos too, and rose petals,
thorns, rice grains, tear drops, flags,
love letters, pencil stubs, candy bars,
pelicans and Christmas trees, window shades,

old keys, hats, lipsticks, snapshots,
station wagons, basketballs, wax candles,
kettles, kittens, marmosets and geese.
And when the box is full, send it to me

at the address printed right below the picture
unless you put the alphabet inside as well—
then no one can read it, leave it in your lap,
I'll pick it up the next time I get born.

2 January 1994

Σηματα

1.

On New Years Day
first thing
I cracked an egg
for breakfast
had two yolks,
auspices of hope.

2.

I see hawks, kestrels,
falcons, even eagles
early, but only
on Sunday
morning, in sun,
year after year.
Signature
of the day.

Today grey-flecked
underbelly and grey wings
outstretched from
old man Voorhis' fields
rising a gyrfalcon far from home.

2 January 1994

VARIATIONS ON AN ALIEN COSMOLOGY

for B.M^cC.

brief answers sometimes follow

delicate
not with
and with not standing
the little flowers
the snow brings
what are they

the rapturous
pretty
mistakes of mind

our moon

callously too
her head
over our shoulders
consistent
turns away

into the periphery

which is all we know
there is no center
to our kind of knowing
we people
of the world

our tastes our fierce
imaginings
flabby syntax of desire

coreless the cove
and the boat, ah,

only the boat knows

paranoid sort of alley

we grew crickets there
in silver cages
wicker loveseats
groaning under love

and the garage doors
swung open in sunlight
but inside cool
the smell of oil

church secrets
in her

but in sun again
the guess of things

motion within darkness

a squirrel there or who I found
waiting all night in the rain
watching my window

mutterings of that young witch
from Christ's own words
indistinguishable

this body me

tiny air

they let us hear
or tune our nerve strings to
or breathe

how could it not be music
when we live?

or island in that we are far

a boatless prophecy
a wall of brass

movement

that is not believed, we never
trust this simple
dance step in the feet
the love the gravity
that holds us
kept to one motion

world wheel

against follicles

the wind does
touch for us
to keep them moving
so that something we
follow,
we follow where the going
is

pheromones

I taste your breathing
the index of your hair
among all others
known textures
like the cold river through a city
I think I lived in once

on a January day
mistless the grey
encumberment of light
fell on that opaque green
between the scows and the cathedral

clang of a trolley and

slight disturbance of the cones

grisaille at least
grey of the masonic temple
four square as the ancient town
against the tower
as if the shadow
held it up
where three streets debouch
into one square

the measurements the *fear*
of moon

because the whiteness of it
lifts an expression
down on us
with the eyes of everyone
we ever lost
looking out of that
blank eye

there is nothing more to fear
than who we have been

and gone
and *no such thing*,

no thing
left for us

we are lost
in becoming (of
course, like a word
in a crowd
heard
without speaker without spoken

pure referent
floating in the shallow space

a word crying for its thing
without us

the terror
of that white speech

a word
without language

but *no language without words*

in this alley
they sell the meat of birds
and tortoises, serpents also
give their lives
for old men's soup

the dog is blind
they lead him
through the room
the quiet dying
is all we have of Eden of
no adam without the passing

away

where we do move
knowing no value
greater than the edge of things
to find beyond the limit of
the shadow

the sound that made us so,
voice
of the border
against the wild silence
rebukes me, snow against the window

the weather
was against me
from the start

no citizen
of this change
this alterable ecstasy
where cats and dogs
rain down and spoons
desert me

it is all right, love, chain her
to the bedstead,
write a letter
to the king
thinking about her all the while

she is your shadow
and you turn
without violence
to the broken light.

2 January 1994

I think of you when the blue Christmas lights
make a magic on the snow I think: *your name*
and then I say it
as loud as light

2 January 1993

DAWN WITHOUT RESERVATION

Enough light to be by

ask for
masks or
veils — across
the stream two sycamores in snow

the dark between
of things

between things,
plum púrports
bitter accents
be said Greetings
from his compassionate
wife

It is the time for masks
they make us dance
—as ever, when the loosening
of our operant identities
lightens the load, the legs
lift more, bike goes,

a riding man is nobodee,
a gypsy in your hands
clutched tight
decanting dubious certainties

you dance
for good

It is permanent
this alleviation,

ever after
when your face comes back
and the mask gets hidden in the shrine again
in greasy rags and wool and whispering,

your face fits different now
though all pretend
everything's the same

the slightest motion breaks the pattern
impulse
and only when it's broken
do you see it was one,

incurable accomplishments of art,
a great cathedral no one ever saw or stepped in,
Jerusalem-faring in the knotwork maze
dizzying turns before the altar

thereby made us dance, nobody ever
stood or saw it standing,
no masks then, veils,
no bodies or faces, the dance
equipped with gravity to crush and levity
to hold the north tower in the sky,

build down from the Cross
I told them,
start with what you know.

W hen the dance (the word
itself old-fashioned,
like negus, pastille, ice-box, coal)
when the dance is tricked to stand
stiff as a building in the shivering dawn
it is just the time of it the stone of it
brick of it, iron's measure, wood's
common measure, the hymn of it, hum

of the wind in it, the resistance,

it is just a stammering, foolishly foot-free,
a dance with no go in it, we go in it,
we stand inside it, canyon of it, the house of it
inside a house inside a house, stand
in it mouth with our mouths open,

whereas the eyes
those deft logicians of the sky
move.

And so the ceiling of the hogan
radiate with willow saplings,

wear a tree on your head
and wade this stream
and if anybody bothers you to ask
tell them it's a dance.

3 January 1994

à l'insu de ma main

1.

This is where we were going and nobody knew
nobody knew, and nobody cared,
the volcano is always waiting for the ardent woman,
Sade knew this, her desire
must be punished by society, every desire
is a crime against the state, which is the status,
which is the eternal sleep of property
safe in the sightless dreams of hands

2.

But unknown to my hand its whole body
strove on the mountain
this was tree and this was limestone this
was a pebble to toss at a quail
so he thunders up at her feet and shakes the tiny sky
full of dust the smell of lavender

3.

Next case a black-cassocked human being
from the Vatican galaxy hurrying to forgive by nightfall
all the velvet sins of afternoon
and the violet stole around his neck gleams in glass light
this is confession when will I kneel down and lie to the wood
lie to the stone and hope the sun hears me
when will I finally tell the truth to the moon

4.

the truth that will crack that old lemon that cold comparison
I love in the text of my bones
I feel her climb the stairs inside me night by night
until the desire is equal to the intelligence and I am born
a word among women to speak with your mouth

H I B E R N A L

Among the permissions reckon this
a bird that knows
(gnaws) the heart,
a pained remorse that tells you more than song,

birds, hearts, songs, what
manner of heraldry is this
with real snow in real wind
among the homeless and those other

terrified possessors, the haves
of brittle things, all houses made of straw.
Stuff this into that and call it love.

4 January 1994

B R A H M S L E M M A

Steps of »The Tragic Overture«
pelting (poltering) tornadoes—

In Die Porte van Cleve we sat Thanksgiving night
eating beefsteak, wonderment of so
many places that we are,

the world is always so far from the word,

call that distance L
by which experience exceeds (falls short of)
description,

by which the world is different from what I mean.

5 January 1994

**Waterfowl settle on the roofpole
an ax clatters on the flagstones.**

The question is a *Visual Dialect*,
things taking care of themselves before our eyes.

The question is words, words like the Chinese,
that get read in different senses
according to the visual dialect you see.

(Some approximations: ㄥ to a Moslem or to a hillbilly

what do
they eyes tell?

Where they perch
on the methods of the thing,

the dialects of Thinglish
waiting to be seen.

It is darkling now,
I will go visit where might be found
a black duck, quacking
before standing on the ice
and flying home

which is always somewhere else,

parliament hill, elephants'
graveyard,

the place
where birds live.

5 January 1994

MY WEATHER

1.

Set this before you
as a kind of snow
sifting down from woodpecker fluttered branches
where crows sit calm for a change
able for once to see everything that moves,

clear meaning of my meaning
here for you. A taste
of what is obvious. This is me.
This is talking to you.

2.

Parts of a man. The Egypt in me
you reached and touched.
The same to you,
the Sumerian
afternoon. Not yet

not yet the night of us.

3.

Some numbers. Eight
degrees by the fire house,
snow slow. Forty
dollars to the dentist.
Drive home by the coffee
roaster, two pounds
of French. A loaf of bread.
No kale till Saturday.
I linger by the new World Almanac
long enough to learn
the flag of Belarus: white
with a strip of red from side to side.
Not a number in sight.

4.

Every year
makes me happy
with these slow things,
the almanac,
flags of new nations.
It's not much to ask,
to know the colors
of your politics.

The snow is
falling on the Middle Ages
still, on which we move
so modernly ruby-red
a line of us
full of war and words.
Under the ice
Eisenstein's Teutonic
knights erect in mud,
brandishing deadly rust at us.
I want to say something about those woods.
Lakes, marshes, tidal streams,
spry fish-hawks harrowing the sedge.

5.

My snow. The thing I meant.
You understood it in me
easily, reached it
better than anyone. Told me
it was there.

6 January 1994

