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W A R

I will not be in that river tonight
that speaks in black and white
a war I was born to. I will not dream.
But the animals are prompt. The legions
sleep leaning on their spears. Caesar also
is unaccountably delayed. War.
It is what is always waiting,
an access of entitlement and I
know nothing more.

13 April 1994

SYCAMORE

A white tree to share with you.
Something peaceable between us:
to look at. Just across the stream
so I get no ideas.

I wonder if you
attend to it in your travels,
this mark of a White Tree left
calm as a shadow at the back of the mind

where we need all the distinctions we can get.
It is, I suppose, a sort of anchor,
not much discussed, inconvenient to budge,
holding us to our mooring. Thought
of a white tree. Be me. Wait,

the tree is white, the celebrants
are masked. I hear the stream, I see
their bodies moving hieratic, dawn or
dusk or just everywhere a failing light,
feet silent in wet grass. Namelessness.

13 April 1994

THE COLORS

In the light of what is happening
all one is, is colors only,

a postcard
from the passerby,

fax from a seagull abruptly ciphered.

There are birds here. Wren. Ducks.
Sky full of gulls over Price-Chopper

and bird by bird the refugees come home.
What can I do but write
in the light of what happens?

Fragile toy of our compassion
so easily set in motion,
so quickly satisfied by sweet emotion
and no consequence, we turn
then into a different seeming
then react to this,

so many arcane spectacles
the changing light
to be persuasive
while you keep smiling, turn
the head switch, the beautiful
old reliable 60-cycle brain hum
of the non-violent world-empowering
Ungrasp, that clasps
to the lips of a smile
the broken miles and all the joinings.

14 April 1994, Saratoga Springs

Where is the money?
This tree is a man this tree a woman—
who is talking to me?

A mistake like a geyser in a quick stream
what hurries one way and shouts another—

park the darkness. At the root of my thumb
meet my own body as I walk on the street

this is me. This heat is the sun's weight
on my very neck. This is my

mistake that casts a shadow

vain loom of me.

15 April 1994

QUESTIONABLE UNITIES

1.

Under the ferns.
Ferns. They unfold
as a fact of spring
and French eat them—

fougères, the tender
fiddleheads when
the papery bitter bitter sheath is torn
away. The foods
we make of things.

2.

Nightmares. Popular music of your parents' era,
what they danced to at their weddings
already scheming to curtail your liberty.
Grins of dead presidents rotting under ground
all through the Middle West, the imposing
oversolid bank buildings now used as discos,

also dying out now, our bodies,
clothes soiled, lying in mud
in the fern brake, alive but quiet,
alive and full of folly, full of I love you,
we were born
in ferns and senses, each sense
unfurls from the tight bitter fiddlehead
("sense object") and
boil in two waters, we are,
wife after wife of things
we are,
married to each thing we see,
made pregnant by every common fact.

It dances
at our wedding,

fern-dance and drown-the-grass,
impregnated by desires, our desires,
the sweet base condition of the planet
rouses to us, it speaks
to us, we smug suitors
with such elaborate experience, the sweet
ancient virgin of the planet
all her looks intact, her lust intact,
comes towards us, under us opening
spring after spring, how wet the ground is here,
uncurling the tight heads of us.

3.

If you go up to visit that high-lying fen
be sure to take me with you all the time.
I am your son, your ram, your laughter
broken out of your grief when the wind
suddenly dishevels your clothes and the thorns
creak on the drier hillside, crackle
of bonfire, I was born in fern and bracken,
a word was my father, I was born on rock and rubble,
strict glaciation, faltering hardwood, hurricanes,
the long canoes beak-prowed with iron rust
and pegmatite and madder, I am an old belt
you a dog fit for whipping, green grow the fiddleheads
and only the little hint of poison yellow
feels like (sounds like a piece of) paper.

The poison of not knowing what you want
is in us. Of wishing what we don't will.
Wishing well, a splash of copper,
Canadian pennies pretty, a queen under clear water,
a ship sailing at the bottom of the sea
under full sail, blue mountains under us,
red golden first then brown bronze then green and blue,
the turning of a metal
through all the sorrows of its story,
we are colors, or
batter on the door of history

and a feeble voice ratchets out a
few glub glub words inside
sounds like a stomach swallowing itself,
nobody here but us colors,
skin drenched from the hands of ferns.

15 April 1994

BUT IT KEEPS COMING

Fearing to miss what's where
he swung at what was
not, a devious entertainment
of anglican verbs,
white-dinner-jacketed like some admiral
but with a hint of Prevenient Grace—

Let the line of a green river carry the
curvy fragments of dream away
—it was a day when all the wrong teams won—
and there is a current heals.
Is it geometry or flow,
substance or its gesture?

Try to know.
I think this is the only thing
worth studying.

16 April 1994, Saratoga Springs

IONIZATION

In this water we drink each morning we find

Sodium

Potassium

Lithium

Calcium

Magnesium

Barium

Strontium

Iron

Aluminum

Manganese

Chlorine

Bromine

Silica

Sulfur

Radium

waiting to benefit us.

Ask for the ions. The dance

in what we do.

The river runs in case we need to go.

Extreme excitement of a face.

One letter at a time slow

as bagpipers' kilts catch fire

and the skirl of cloud

lets snow over a slept-in city

o road my ultimate guitar.

16 April 1994, Saratoga Springs

The difference between a woodpecker
and what I did is you were surrounded
by a mangrove swamp my clothes were wet
the sea in its insolent sunshine was keening for me

I waited and that was the end. There has to be a system
where saying their names possesses all that is useful of them
the way one stares at things until they become part of your mind—
Dante knew and blamed the eyes. Now you have changed
the architecture of this house, system of my things, my hard
wired image that runs me. What is so touched becomes the way
for you to think ever after until finally if finally
the river breaks. You break the river.
The difference was it goes in and gets it and I waited.

Always relentlessly pacifist. We stare at reciprocals
until I am unhinged by velocity, star-systems receding from me.
Spread my maps to hold a branch and I am animal.
Or fall and this thick water is my air. I belong to number.
Determined bachelor things in their elements, can I see
the face I am looking with, the hardware, the danger.

There are hinges and there are doors
—which art thou, o traveller?

17 April 1994, Saratoga

P R I M A

And while we were away the green
invented the fields again and blue flowers
rushed blindly to the air and looked like eyes,
blackbirds with red chevrons on their sleeves
patrol the little birds signed up to eat and sing.

18 April 1994

P A S S I O N

Find what forwards and consider.
It. Falter into it but in.
Stairways sensitive to heat.

It is the passion
counts us into place.

Avars. Gepids. Lombards. Huns
White and Ephthalites. Turks
with their hawks. Camel-many
puritan Bedouins.

Someone
is always bound to happen,
let it romance you if it can

before the killing comes,
blue tile domes and sunset
crackling the towers of it.
My castle you.

The same is not the same. A number
lights only itself, a name lights millions.

The difference in language.
Say it is a little runnel through new grass
say it is a someone sitting there

say it is a someone sauntering the road
and this road is Rome
and this pilgrimage is home.

Say it is a finding and a forward
say it falters but is fast

then say the staircase knows who climbs it
and the ancient dusty bed is always listening.

19 April 1994

Once around the year with you
is never enough. I wanted a waltz
that rolled old time back east
and the sky swallowed the sun and

sometimes we get what we want
(*coule la Seine*) and sometimes
the river reaches us and sews
a thousand hurts together in one

bright pain-glance of sun sheen
and then you know that time's afoot again
and all the hidden glory of our touch
whispers if we listen hard inside

and tells us all the bridges name by name.

20 April 1994

Every one needs one of those
a mixed encounter broken journey
something handed over one way or the other
deep remembered. It doesn't
always have to be a kiss.

On a train mine was,
the washroom signs were done in Russian
and snow outside and not so fast
a windy corridor runs through windy twilight.

Ducks and ponds and families. A wheel
goes everywhere. You closed
your eyes without water or apologies.
Outside was nowhere. We were found.
Then the train did the other thing trains do.

21 April 1994

Imagine a word lifted in the woods
like the claw of an eagle
—a hundred years later the talons are still
scalpel and terrible—
so that the spiny young canes of the raspberry
get in the way of what you mean
when you saunter out of the book in search
of where glorious Nineteenth Century prospects abound

and you have given yourself away by language
—a moment's inattention and the banana tree empty
coreless core of you shows up — wood made out of water—
the words never empty enough to set you free.

Hollow, they are dusty outside. Or greasy.
A crow calls down the hill
to mark the new light. Fathoms of our time,
dawn in after-equinoctial season,
already the day's light is firm in the old TB hospital
up in the trees, hear the light,
revolutions are so slow, the crow
warns us of new things.
The word he says is not hollow.
He has no audience. I did, I wanted
to be in their mouths, to know what I had said
by what they meant. And so they said.

22 April 1994, Oneonta

P O E T R Y

it was my way of being close to you
as if I had run steadily from a great distance
~~through pine woods and fern~~
and came to your house panting
and mistook all my gasping for breath
for something I wanted to tell you.

22 April 1994, Oneonta

G O D S

Make the curve straight.
Illustrate a bandanna which
worn around a young neck
keeps from war. How.
Holy sweat of a kind skin.
There are siphons underground
that drag our anger down
and then across the bridge men drink
that furious water.

*Sit on the stone
beside me
what sound could lovelier?
We seal the earth
her contract
signed, weight of us
walking.*

Ambling, the prophet mused.
Her hands were cold, she hid them
under her arms, she walked, she prayed
(to walk is to pray)
to the Red God at the bottom of her body,
the noble one, the pure
Animator Blest, Corpus Mei, that made
her prophesy and celebrate and know.
She watched the serene entablature within,
inmost frieze of her violent dance,

inside, where the love is.
She prayed to be worthy of the god was her

and such musings are clean morning.
In the grooved mystery of the locust bark
where the sunshine gets lost
and Shapes candidly appear

outlined by eye's
anxiety for the Other to appear
and crows chase hawks, she prayed
to the Gods of her body
be well and be well and be many
and furnish the world with their lights.

Here colors come. See, it is day.

She said: sit on the stone and she sat.
She said: seal the letter you have written
and she spoke. She said
Now read what I have written and she slept.

Her sleep woke me and I was.
I found a red pen in me and I wrote.
A boulder is a thing to roll away.
Night noises: scantlings at their shivaree—
it is the *day* that means to be silent,

and honor the Gods inside your body.
You cannot know how many of them there are
and how far their distant fiefdoms spread
or what the edges or the limits of you are,
even you, not to speak of them.
You are a congress of such powers and a voice.
The shape they lend the wind is what you speak.

23 April 1994