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THE WATERFOWL AT CRANBROOK

Among the wild geese waking
found them trooping towards our room
in heavy rain
after a crow began it all,
the call, the way they do,

the À from heaven
signifying all the rest of the letters,
everything we'll ever have to say
signed in that cry,

all the alphabet
speaks now in us. As us.
And by us in turn
the geese are spoken
back into place. Wind and water.
Silence now
after all that genesis and lawn.
Two swans far out on the lake
exeunt stage left.

How vast they seem.

To us in our diminished senses,
trying to learn kindness at the corners of water.

11 August 1994
Michigan

In the temple an ordinary policy

by which attention is summoned to the loudliest
heart of a hand, I speak at random
out of cold fear, body fear of hurt and crippling,
impermanence is not something to fear,
it is the ground and remedy, *mutabilitie*.

12 August 1994
Cranbrook

C R A N B R O O K

We came for the form of it,
a landscape busy thinking
using crows and herons and ferns for thoughts,

all the famous vista'd distances
aligned in this near stone.
I found a mirror with leaden metal

tracery like vines in it
to relieve my face of being me
amidst the green rides and propitious silences of rain.

12 August 1994

As if by thunder a god word got said
just at dawn, confusing me, as if the light
itself had finally spoken
and said its name.

13 August 1994
Cranbrook

Geese shelter from the lake. I hear them,
I like this story so much, with heavy rain, goose yawps,
the lay of the lake and one in all this pother
serenely sailing swan. Wings puffed out
to receive the guiding breeze. Sentences end
(even in German, in Michigan,
in this geological era, bed rock, in rain).
Swan, you one white verb in all these sodden nouns
seen quick between some trees and some more to move.

13 August 1994
Cranbrook

SAID WITH THE SLAB IN HIS HANDS

(first hearing Pat playing)

By the quality of information to importune
a heady clarity — this means you —
from the walking commentary of this newest
(music) scholiast accompanying the artful
yet every now and then profound tootling of some piano
makes its way into the Antarctic and you bring it back.
There is logic here. For passion is common
(if muted mostly) (sheen of the lake nearby) acts
of translation. Light beyond garages stirs.
For walking is listening. He drinks
a stirrup cup a membrane is just anybody's
skin (just anybody is the very one we need)
(mean) you are providing just that information.
Already I can see the lake.

Take this quiet amber.

Amber always sounds like something said
along a desert road, said by one person to another,
not just lost in air, spoken
among leathery customers bringing things —always
more things— along a road that fronts the sea
from far away — a curve of salt on the skirt of a hill
then something blue — could that be it? Is a man
finally home? — Amber always sounds like that
in the sunlight of the going — always going—
that such men are always doing. Music names us.

14 August 1994
Ann Arbor

As if the *before* in a picture of the moon made some of us cry
when we see the *after* almost every night and can't tell the difference

but the difference knows us —how?— and the lacy privilege
of clothing lets out enough skin light to remind us of something, but what?

14 August 1994
Ann Arbor

Trouble Light?

This fair autumnal in Ann's Arbor
the Second Sister pond so cool I shivered
—a snake sheltered there in sunlight—
and now a cold night (late and be glad),
a footsore rhymer, a Rebel lance-corporal
and the god heart men wear in their bones
drums away in deepest caring. If only
we could learn to share what we already
but so unconsciously always know—
and take *that* pain as *this* meaning
and set them free, all of them, by sympathy,
from whatever hurts them, by the sheer
'unfair' surprise of it. Whereas we
have seen the spider, and signed the contract.

14 August 1994
Ann Arbor

WRITING IS

Writing is the generosity of writing down whatever comes into your mind, in sequence, true as you can,

the diligence of working with that, in all the ways you can, to make it speak. To make it say more than you know.

The patience to know that what it is saying is more important, always, than what you want to say.

The moral discipline not to impose your automatic wants and tired urges on a clean text, the fresh white of it. Not to use the words to sell yourself or your ideas.

The concentration to stay with the work under hand, the evolving text, stay close inside it, thinking only with it, and not thinking beside it, letting all thinking and feeling come to focus in it, as it.

The wisdom to know when you're done. When it's done.

15 August 1994
Ann Arbor

THE HAYWAIN

could the climb into that struggle straw too
Mr Mrs? Could we burrow down
in satin bodices like beads of sweat on Tuesday
—frightened of sun, sky hides in crevices
as wet— could we be skin? Unseen by frequency
and always touched? Air alarms us,
the desires of the tribe inscribed as stars
over the scrappy cloud cover. Whereas
(said the lawyer in me) the lake lies true
and soft and smooth in darling daylight,
aren't you, maybe a hint of breath,
a word missed on that single surface, First Sister,
klingons coming down to fish in the cool afternoon
but here it's morning, could it be, mister? 4x4
on its way up gravel, the woman in the cockpit
looks like she's pedalling, empty liner, Port of Spain
just over the hill, I admit it, we are destinations
and I'm an alien, *ajeno*. The wheels go huge,
catafalque bearing the corpses of night, prairie dog,
I am too old to skateboard so I fly. This brittle
body, faith. Here from whose Holland to worship
midland skin? What pilgriming? Softly, waking no one,
at the maple table in a quiet house I travel,
imperious burble of the coffee maker song enough,
metabolites, the chemicals of ordinary life.

16 August 1994
Ann Arbor

A SMALL STEP BACK

There is a well beyond the moon
and drunk from that
I never cared much for these landings

or hid from it
in the dark rhetoric of having form.
Fun. Soixante-neuf

and eagle each other
and call that the dark side of the moon.
They claim it was done in Hollywood,

fat airless bounce by slo-mo worked
and no one went.
But no one ever goes

and the moon is palpably different.
You can tell when a young man has been touched,
there is something he wants to hide and share at once.

16 August 1994
Ann Arbor

FIRST SISTER LAKE

for Charlotte

What rises from the lake? One wakes.
The world is a story about waking
told to people who sleep.
Mist on this one I suppose,
breath on the mirror. Psyche,
they called it, someone coming.
Sun in hardwood treetops
and perch dreaming in the shallows.
Sisters they call them, lakes, two,
the gravel works get their sluicing
water here, comes very cold from
springs below through that long
foot-wide rust brown pipe warm
from sunlight. Warm to my touch,
so no water had been flowing,
no water I knew. But you
went swimming, a great smiling
red-haired lucency slipping through
dark water towards me on the jetty
talking, you were you said a fish
a silver fish come to nip me, the smile
of you was more than any lake,
a wife in water.

2.

To let the sense of things
be sisterly. One flesh
and coming from the same entanglements
I could carry something till it fell.
I could bring a towel
to cape around you when you climb
the wooden ladder into the afternoon,
hot on the jetty, to be in sun

and not be brotherly with sun. To be a rock
incised with animal images,
rust rubbed in the signifying grooves
to mark a red chronicle, to be flat,
sun slays us into history, text and all
that devious weary afterbirth
of saying anything at all.

3.

It was never hard to say I love you
(tune I've been whistling all my life)
till now I felt it more than I ever did,
the quick swimming towards you in me
of all I was, to meet you, silver,
in your own water. And I did.
I want to know what is so womanly
in telling that the words
accept and dismiss each other
with such accurate ease, I want to know
how loving lets us speak. So I could go on
saying everything except the thing that says me.

17 August 1994
Ann Arbor

Don't think of the word on the wall.
Every lake takes you back.
They had composure, the glad
people who live under bridges

in children's stories. Quick motherly
hand — one prays to what one knows.
Lydia, a child and a long white radish.
I am living in the post office

and all the letters are to you. Touch
touch kiss kiss stamp
and the dark learns how to read.
The wet unmysterious leaves

of rhododendron in all night rain,
how kind water is. I think
of Emile Nelligan, smother-mothered
until he turned and would not show her,

in horror he hid from her beauty,
the contradiction of wanting anyone but her.
How dare a poet want beyond his muse?
The nightmare of living as if what you spoke

believed you, and no one else did,
and they put you in a room. As one does.
Don't think of anything simple
(thinkable). Think of imposing palaces

built entirely of dust or glass or wheat,
with loges of wine and fireplaces full of milk.
Or those high fluffy factories we rode
over yesterday, clouds over Canada.

Why do the leaves give so much?
A drunkard supposing himself to be invisible

staggers to the center of the world
and stands there voluble and sweating.

Here is where the other-mother
is busy waiting. Play that piano
till your clothes fall off
and call the shivery bareness Eden,

explain that water is not wet enough.
We have to fall. Something neither mother
nor lover gets into the car and goes.
For we beget nothing but journeys.

18 August 1994

ROMAN CUSTOMS

1.
Stay and never sally. Wanting
to talk about the weather
in such original detail, why
do I want to tell, the day of it?
The hills and hovels are thrown in
for lagniappe, and our hearts
are bargains. Only the weather—
which is what happens— and leave
to the Wise what happens behind.
All that. Soft quilt of light
patched from rain glisten on the roads.
I am here to pay attention.

2.
Line breaks in superb poetics
built the purple palaces of Rome,
I claim that porphyry.
Not sally. Wanting to drive
a spike deep into oakwood
and wanting to be wood.
To take something from the priest's
hands that makes you you.
Is that just weather too?

3.
I ask you. There are amplitude,
grace and nomination and belief—
exact words, as to say of a leaf *Platanus*
is our sycamore, it gave this to me
from the sky. Here is this old
Livy magic time of day, a brother
with his fist twisted in his brother's hair.
We built this portico to saunter in
talking of nothing much. And here
you'll find a magic sort of man
who reads the sky by braille,

touching every wind with reverent hands.

19 August 1994

S A I N T S

I never had a cult of saints until they had a different name
to share with unbelievers, their mothers now and mothers then,
secure fortress of the world they sneak into
full of an alien and lovely conversation that makes me hear.

19 August 1994

See I was writing right through the silences like a prisoner
with no paper but his skin and no pen but his ideas
to hold in mind till they turn true and clear, not his
any more, just the accurate shadows of birds flying past
his window cast on his belly or his bed, then being still.

19 August 1994

I would like to move the agenda. Open
like so many lotuses. You float
to the top of all the places you have been

and your poverty at last is only relative.
You still remember that girl on Eighth Avenue
you saw from a yellow bus, forty years ago,
snug skirted, Irish, talking wild
not walking, laughing with friends.
Why do you hold her so long in mind?
She counts for something, as if all the other
mothers on the street were no account
or the world is empty. What a hollow mind!

Eating from the medicine cabinet. Dreaming
her again, on a corner near the General Post Office,
there was a passionate wilfulness in the air
her hips expressed. That's as much as I know about it.
Revolution comes so slow. How can a turn
of waist or wrist or arm so move the world?
Bleak in mind's house a remembered shape?
For that's the sign of it we mark to mean,
clenched fist upraised (taut and angry lotus)
or workers arm in arm, wheel and wheat sheaf,
hopeless, an eternity of signs.

20 August 1994

No time for this
so I'll just answer

the morning
full of green opera

rushes towards an enchantment
something you see in the sky that isn't in the sky.

21 August 1994

CONSOLAMENTUM

It always rains before it dies
the imperson that is me. I reach over there,
up to the ankles in myself. Telling nouns from verbs,
so difficult, mere English. *For we like sheep*
and sing in rain. The tested absolute (“egg
cracked on a zinc counter”), the essence milked.

This much. (Arms spread wide, biggest love-fish
never caught, the lie of feeling.) And on the last breath go
to another planet, hands inside each other,
would we, surgeons of the most intimate,
grovel before the meekest of our own servants, skin?
What planet? Count your way to it by dreamy ciphers,

math teacher sitting at her desk among reluctant numbers
insolent as wasps at jam jars (in the moonstruck
gardens of the Emperor, midnight jessamine, opal
enterprise of cloudwork by the panting moon,
turn of the century sacred jazz). Count. A friendly atmosphere,
gravity a little less than ours, exhilarate, light foot,

the meters of the infinite. By paradox and picnics
we fare in mind. O my sweet Jerusalem my bride!
It is dangerous as any thinking is. This rain is jismy
and far, a noble neighbor sweats with privilege,
her harp his semaphore, his hopes her logarithms,
a strategy for thought. Fearlessness begins in fear. A crow,

a certainty on high. Be black. Sound off. The wild serene
contains your animal. It is morning, the alchemic mean.
I have confessed to wanting you in action. Like a bridge.

22 August 1994

