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What does it mean to have a world  
grovel at your feet?

A load of accidents  
in a grassy basket—

I looked at it and saw my own  
four-year-old plump hand hold  
a green basket, the radio  
said A tisket a tasket

but my basket was just green,  
wicker, no yellow, just the crinkly  
grass of artifice and a big hoop handle  
and the top of the radio hot to the touch.

O language you last impiety you god.

26 July 1993

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Canapitsit Neck  
the sea full of flowers

What does it mean  
to remember?

Is there an emulsion  
where are stored  
deeds true or fancy's

a domain  
without a word  
all imagery and sense

and her legs firmly moving  
beside me down the glare  
hot white sand at Rockaway  
her thigh at eye level  
wet bathing suit  
unremembered, Naiad?

Why do I taste that cloth?

The past is no more.  
Or no more mine  
than yours,  
the past is Common Shore,  
belongs to whoever finds it  
there, between the sea-poppies and the sea.

26 July 1993

## THE FALL OF ROBESPIERRE

The chancery is full of litigation. Documents pile up like sandwiches in a Red Cross shelter after a domestic earthquake. Somebody profits from everything. Take to the law. Lust is a test. A sheen of wetness on the ground, two millimeters of rain this month and now a breath of it, a maybe in the trees. Being corruptible might be a part of being just — money is a part of religion, what a people does over and over, cult of the Greek states. Virtue. Corruption is the rent owed to principle. Being incorruptible says nothing about being right. A drunkard writes and writes, asks Will I be able to read this in the morning? laughs and falls asleep. Here the present (our solitary art) is corrupted by the future. Lucid cardinal in a hazy business. Tree, bark streaked with rain, not universally wet. Suppose the sky were yours and yours alone—would you go there? Bring it here? Sell it all and give the money to the poor? Wear it as your clothes? Imagine dressing in emptiness, serene in an empty city. The poor have never loved me. Imagine being deaf when all of them are cheering you, just you. A pain in the offending member.

Societies are weakened as much by public virtues as by private vice. History never cares how hot it is inside my clothes. Where my legs come together. I hide the joinings of all things, all things. The city is my only genitals. Saipan, where the flies, the heat. So many wars to remember in one plain mind. Sergeant Merda with his dumb pistolet, made the remnant of my life unlivable. A lawn glider in morning gloom. They say there is no pain like death, but it goes away. A blue thing, like a flag, is flapping in the wide plaza of my brain. Simulacra of liberty, a skull in my hand, my own cup, sweet with the long thoughts, I am decocted. Libido. Birds stealing seed in the very footsteps of a deaf sower.

Where were you born? Where two avenues hurrying north joined to make one, and held me in the crook of her arm. Where the sea came close and we smelled it every night, firm in the air as a wooden chair we sat on, hoping the heat would pass. Where old airplanes waddle down the sky and cut their engines when they have come to rest, and in that silence something is thinking. Think what I think. And now you will

never know, or only know what the shadow tells,  
the legend and the origin, the Irish darkneses  
and the flat light of grey northern fields, potatoes  
and leeks, electric pylons stalking over the fields  
of rapeseed.

I was born where the forest had forgotten the sea.  
I chose a place where they had to teach me  
Greek. Treeless for a thousand years. Fastidious  
as grammar, I have been promiscuous only in the  
crimes of history. I have been most assassins,  
and every single assassinated one, with no  
remainder. There is none of me unslain. Except  
this me we slay again, today, blue-bonneted  
Death, asking more questions than she knows  
how to answer. In Paradise we will forgive our  
friends.

How I have hidden from them all the secret  
adventures of my body, sometimes at noon when  
someone strikes a match, lights a cigarette, sips a  
beer, I hint at the truth of me, the truth is me. A  
body is all striving. Not just the hands of it, or  
the sex of it, but all of it. The skin which is light.  
The dark inside, o they are many. Maroons and  
ambers, cardamoms palest green like March  
afternoons. cinnamon, lose my place, o I am

dying from fragrances away, o I loved liberty for me.

If you love liberty, truly, truly, not just a fashion of speaking or public noise, if you really love her, don't you want all of her for yourself? You don't want to share her with anyone. The birds come and go inside my mind. Is there a dentist who extracts such pain? What if my answer is no more than a wet leaf? Of a bush whose species is unknown to me. Not gorse, not rose, not raspberry, yet there are thorns to things. And if I outlive love, what will my skin have to say? Who waits for me in the Artois? Does anyone remember that grey flat sky I came from? Not from earth and not from Arras, I am the son of the horizon, huge horizons of the north country, flat as the pages of a lawbook, over its incomprehensible formulas and dishonest promises and sly remedies, I have slept and dreamed my way to the summit of the earth. Why isn't it raining?

*27 July 1993 / 9 Thermidor 200*

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What every wants is rain at night.  
Falter. Touch a hand  
you never touched before,  
a hand called water.

28 July 1993

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Once along the Los  
Angeles in summer  
(a river) three

braceros rinsed their clothes  
spread them on the broad  
concrete apron the almost  
dry river wears

against the day.  
I saw this.  
I thought  
you would understand.

28 July 1993

[late night e-mail response in the Owens *renga* cycle]

## THE INSCRIPTION

That sometimes things work  
and that's a simple word  
some lettering on a window  
tells me to come in

because it is the skin  
that rules these joinings and the mind  
is lord of partings  
wanting always a new door

Turn the mind into a window  
and the skin into a wall  
then the door can grow old  
and beautiful like an October leaf.

29 July 1993

# A BOOK OF TITLES

(with timorous scholia)

*Therewith the Journey*

*Forgetting My Hands*

*Absolve the Lover*

*Portugal is Spain*

*Ortexts*

*Ortexts & Prime Eases*

*Remap*

*Remap Your Body As My Body*

In a time of politics, a man falls back upon his own only body.  
Not as masturbator, utterer, demiurge, Ptah-like expresser of  
the real, but merely as the only valid field of inference  
permitted him, inference, ingERENCE, intuition, skepsis,  
perception, delight.

Long years ago, the ghost of feeling was reborn as You. Time  
now to *ta'wil* it back to its original — where feeling is, there is  
no need for other.

Other ought to be our bare intention, motive: to make happy.  
Bestow benefit, even bliss, on what is not me.

Ortext is *Urtext* — that is, what was picked up only as an alternative turns out to be, to have always been, the primeval text itself. Or is it prime-evil I do mean, the ego as root of this sad tree?

*The Lords of Remorse*

*Sitting on the Table*

*Cracked Lute and Moon Policy*

*The History of Less*

*Fort Angus and the Big Island Stones:*

*Arranged Like All the World's Horizons*

*Piled Up One on One Forever*

*Alternate Your Energies.*

*Dao Jia: A Liniment for Jarred Joints*

*The Lone Renga*

*Neglecting to Desist, Wo'ful Murder's Done*

*The Alba Lost*

*I Answer Me.*

29 July 1993

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I want to know  
if the flash of yellow I saw  
was as I supposed  
a goldfinch

in among maple saplings or  
just one drought-stricken  
leaf made all the yellower  
by contrast with two blue-jays who

were there and are there  
and who am I asking  
and why?  
A leaf called sere. A bird called gone.

29 July 1993

## ARCANE MEASUREMENTS

*for Charlotte*

A spool of waxed twine I admired  
on your island, where will I find it now  
and the yellow sea-poppies long ago  
folded back into onrushing daylight  
and a crow is warning me on this lawn.

There is a kind of understanding that obliterates  
everything— easy dapple, leafy biennale,  
among these profitable forests, invest  
in shadows — you see it in old men often  
who have been bright young men in England once.

Or in women who remember pain. To say even less  
of all this truth my body was turned into  
from all my saying and withholding? What is the bird's  
warning? A threshold waiting for some royal foot,  
welcome, Ma'am, be careful of the little kitchen gods

in my sullen house. Later this same year  
the sun will rise on Christian rooftops  
in a town where gulls still remember how to fish  
and how to sleep on waves, crows walk the lawn,  
I'm trying to remember how men are, the trees are big

and frighten me when I trying to think of standing still.  
Maybe they did once, and look what happened.  
A mild hysteria fills me, like reading newspapers.  
But there is no news. The ball of twine  
is working loose now, I who followed any footstep

can follow this, where she looped it room to room,  
ripple over threshold, always leading out and in,  
the tide-wise numerology of years, the rule of sixes,  
suns, nines, Venus rising, glass of virtue, mint-marks  
you read pressed into the belly of the sun, a word

you thought she said she would never repeat. We made all this.  
Just before dawn in the Wasatch, sky fumbling with dark,  
heavily, leaning (leading) on each other, Seth and Adam,  
Shem and Japeth, Stan and Ollie, stumble west,  
trying to escape the light. Repeat the hard words

till your mouth knows what they mean.  
In the local calendar today means Sin—  
non-sexual, soon-discovered, a bird yells it  
at the side of the road you are punished by going,  
all the road-kill animals collect on the highway of the dead.

An actual star. Hel leads them in her new blue dress,  
genetic congress, concert of the powerless,  
daylight in Idaho. In a train yard shed a rustic fellow  
studies bebop on a small polished wooden radio.  
From the intricate woodwork of confessions escape is easy,

the problem's being at ease with where you are  
then, there, when the sun can't find you and the river  
surrenders to night and even the woman who brings the mail  
has no reason not to smile at you, and does smile,  
vaguely, while she picks out all your boring letters.

For you are guilty. You were born on earth knowing better  
and spent your life spending it. That it was about  
something or could have been, just now you think about that  
and worry. It wasn't just to get from a.m. to p.m.  
like the river from Hudson Falls to New York Bay,

it wasn't to merge handily with some salt sea  
like falling asleep after orgasm. It was being alone.  
It was being born with a measure in your mind  
and never using it, a key in the door. The door walks.  
The door looks like the sky, or a transom

in your first cheap furnished room (pale green)  
when you came home from Paris as if you'd never been here  
on your native planet, Polish wedding,  
Texas breakfast, Yiddish daily paper, romance, blue things,  
how happy you were to hear people talking

in languages you didn't understand. The Automat  
on Twenty-third Street where they spoke Welsh.  
The man who tried to teach you Danish —  
with a sore foot if I remember, worn out  
from glottal stops. Mystery was all you meant.

And now a thing like a spoon gets you started, star-sick,  
falling asleep with a name. Cabala is the hardest mistress,  
always receiving, never taking, always reading  
never sleeping, or if she sleeps a name  
does all her snoring, breathing one more mystery.

Identity. A rime of things (like clover and wild onions)  
(like birds and scraps of sycamore bark let fall,  
scalloped wayside) (like chariots and oxygen) (like drug stores),  
a war is always beginning, a rime of things  
(Alexandria forgot and Jefferson remembered)

to touch the fresh virgin core region of the name  
choice intact no matter how oft spoken

(Whitman kneels by the gangrened gunner  
patiently breathing, just being with him)inside  
a dubious flower someone left between doorknob and door.

To vouch for something strange, lily petal, poetria,  
touch of the other, clang of the door,  
garage bathroom, smell of kind and sheen  
of carbon, the grease of things touches  
sinks, seasons, semaphores. Finally the sea.

So few names do that to me. A shave, a shower,  
saying good-bye before dawn bottle in hand  
still cool the neck of it, warm where your mouth was,  
stars, vestibule, street, streetlight, continent—  
I asked you to come back from the moon.

And you came, slim in bearing, ample  
in instances, name by name. This dreamed me.  
Enough of childhood. There is a dam and a sluiceway  
near it, shaggy grove of hemlocks. broken masonry.  
She sits on that rough block (—Saturn in Libra—).

Just as Dürer saw here there, distressed with measurement.  
Pensive, a little irritated, *un peu genée*, the way it is  
when a whole avenue of traffic runs through your head  
and peels around the Arc de Triomphe in your heart.  
Victory means: to go on (like “Writing”) the Conqueror

overwhelms the temptation to stop. Blessing is continuous.  
Or not at all, like weather. Wait—  
the cufic angularity of ordinary thinking  
—creeps around corners, slinks to the sofa,  
dreams about what it has seen, all of them,

plunders the papers in a mad raid on God.  
You came in your instances to silence my hurry.  
Thought wastes good cunning. A ring  
on our fingers, a gold remark— who's watching  
when the water tower catches setting suns?

I have come there until it is a harbor  
and have set sail till it became the sea.

30 July 1993

SUNDAY, ON THE THIRTEENTH OF  
THERMIDOR, IN THE YEAR 200 OF THE  
REVOLUTION

Not so bloody minded as to celebrate The End  
in steel and scaffold of a whilom prince  
an advocate from the forgotten busy north, whence light,  
whence inwardness. Not so bloody as to beget  
a Tory supper club called Glad Thermidor.

(There is a hint here in the midst of politics —*Misthaufen*,  
one calls it, in polite Bismarkese— of something truer,  
immanent, lucider than Kant, a steady oil-lamp  
from the Himalayas, a hint that north is holy, is light,  
enlightenment, and for all our agony we move north.)

Among the very wealthy, time becomes about spending itself  
(as the painters say painting is “about” color), as in hot weather  
the heat seems to be about itself and all we do is pay attention.  
Work's a relief from heat. Death introduces himself  
as a fancied intermission to this noxious opera

we've gotten caught in —how?— noisily but vaguely  
huzzahing the fall of tyrants. Whose faces (when they hoick  
the head out of the basket below the guillotine) all seem  
to have our features. The same thin lips, the same incorruptible  
self-esteem. So at the end of that busy old July

the blade falls on Maxilmilien and his shattered mandible  
and all the murderers in France pause a few seconds  
while tyranny and bankers rearrange their pawns. Grieving,  
I hear far away the throb of radio, the angry answer  
from the Ghost Countries that men call music.

31 July 1993