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In stoic dread
he read
the paper they called news
and found the old
catastrophes instead

stale miracles
of other people's death.

7 August 1993

As much as such people are able to tolerate,
that much is language (the angel said).
Otherwise anywhere, they are random in
affect. They strew. A word's a kind glue
holds them (so briefly be it) to what is theirs.

Tonus oracularis, a veil
abrupted, a cincture
sliced. Harp-horns splay
to hold the strings (tones) taut—
I am an interval, he said.

That's all. Between valleys a mountain,
between mountains a valley—
it seems forever without variety, yet the dialects!
Barrancas of New Spain, every cleft
its own language, every tongue
its own city. And they speak,
a city is all speaking.

Steel watchband tells your time,
the hands of the watch are irrelevant—
you belong to the hour, that's what counts.
Not number. Heart beats.
Not a river, the tide.

7 August 1993

It was always unclear how close
you could get to the center of the world
the thing they used to call the heart

but we went, pilgrims, jorsalfaras,
scholars of penguins and crevasses
until the sun was gone and the night

itself rolled up like a scroll
then there was only, skyless, the moon.
In compassion we tried to travel

but the city and our Viking ways
kept getting the worse of us,
we were successful instead of accurate

we survived, we paid taxes,
we shopped. And all the while
the heart (what else can we call it?)

was close to us, the doctors even tried
to persuade us it lived inside, in us,
but we knew their desires betrayed them

the heart is always outside, blue
like the backside of the moon, hung
always above us and before us

glowing, coming towards us with its light
until we seem to move towards it
until there is no difference between

to be and to go. And then we know.

8 August 1993

GALATIA

The approach
is arrogant,

the why
whines.

Yet the man is blue
like the Baltic

and wide
like the Euxine Sea we saw

north of Trebizond
then underneath us

till that last Celtic port
the call

where in the vowels
of the argument

itself you hear
the god

speaking,
little rosary of the breath.

9 August 1993

AMARANTH

I thought of you, a friend at court
easy with princesses. And me,
a cracked cup and a saucer
stained with berries, yellow
from turmeric too, an age to go.
I am reporting my defects—
willing you to know them,
tired from the beginning. Ready,
but with a crack. And a handle
glued back on. And the wrong symbol
anyhow, a male is not a cup,
a man is not a name.
I am a kind of shadow
of where you go.

9 August 1993

FIRST INTENSITY

In? Intense a city, in tense a sense
tensed in tending. Tent city
in tentative times, then tense
attempts to spend a terror.
Send. Intense intensity, first
in, then on. An inmost errant
entering event. In times
a timed attempt. *Attentat*
he said, trying to time a crime
to tend to time by tying
lifetimes off, intensity of murder
manifold. A time. But which is first?
A time or taken, a token tamed,
a tense reminder that remains
when the time itself has turned away?
The first intensity you meant is him
again and him back in your bed.
Time is where we belong and still.
Until.

9 August 1993

She spoke, using
the word blandly
not even smiling
the way a devotee kindles
a votive candle after confession
just making sure the waxy spill
gets the wick flaming

and not bothering
with the meaning
yet until it's gleaming in the ruby glass
or blue for the heart of a mother
frowning gently
with concentration
to get it done. The communication.
Then we ask questions, smile, open
dictionaries, write checks, check the weather.
Then we stop the madness and stand still
and listen hard to the empty sky.

10 August 1993

BUILDING WITH STONE

Like two horses
a hill with a cave high up it

cave to find in,
a dark permission in a hopeless wall

bright chunks of dolomite:
polishing marble with marble.

He grinds the two together in his hands.

11 August 1993

(in the renga series)

spotted, the mind
is spotted

salmon-brock or Port of Spain
speckled, the sea
resolved to flicker

(Whorf's frequentative aspectuals,
in Hopi, Moqui they used to say,

squash-blossom hairdos, and the sidelong
glances of the intellectuals
tempests without rain

thunder without sound,

fleered like Hamlet at anybody
graceless enough to be alive,

o Carib isle.

24 October, 2016

THE WAY OF MEANING

Things mean by months.

A woman's face
painted on a small gilt casket
I think a bird
perches on the sun

her cry can wake me
I think a face
looks at me out of the dark

long grillwork of moons
truth tables, you are me,
a number by exhaustion
achieves identity with itself

things mean by moons
by waiting
by coming to the end of your strength
and it still goes on

things mean by endlessness, the rote
raptures of springtimes, dawns,
thunderstorms

some people like music I like the world
condemned to this opera I breathe

things mean by never letting
and always being
things mean by exhaustion
by no measure, by a wall

things mean by circles and by hands
the little casket opens
things mean by being empty

it is a code
made of weather

an encyclopedia of leaves
alphabet of clouds

no answer
things mean by stars by absence
streams of meteors from Perseus tonight
I will not watch them

strive at this season
to reach the earth

we stand on our rooftops in drizzle
saying Somewhere someone is saying something to us.

12 August 1993

You stayed away too long.
There is a hope built into morning
that doesn't always last.

I wanted the one of you naked
with your right hand touching a star,

drunk as a cup, blue as a sparrow
hurrying away from the ground.

I wanted to think about you as things
different from yourself, I wanted you

to be other people other sexes other species
until you were owl and peartree and jade.

I wanted you to be jade and thunderstorm
and rain. Mostly I wanted you to be rain.

12 August 1993

THE APPARATUS

All my dubious operations
are pictured here:

solution of elemental Mercury
in a bath of copper sulfate
in the presence of catalytic Optimism

sending pure vapor of conscious joyance
through the gas delivery tube
into the patient cobalt flask
marked with a syllable
I found in my heart.

Your heart.
You know the symbols for all this,
alphabets you find in the grain of wood.

Of distilled anxiety
three drams
rinsed over nightmare
creates one more morning.

12 August 1993

MY SIXTY WORD AD IN THE HOLISTIC
CLASSIFIED DIRECTORY

That some imagined
intricate birdsong ambassador
one or two
quiet egg released
thunder too often
road to Rome
sauntering meek Alps
Savoy counting pilgrims
Abundance species persons
we cow to
each other breeding
promising spiral cathedrals
"oak over" Iroquois
therapy middle river
compact formation chemistry
ovoid manners opening
fort barbarian sundress
pepper estrangements field
continuous emulsion singeing
ravaging studios petroleum.

12 August 1993
Rhinebeck

HOW IT BEGAN

Trying to fix it
if not in mind then
where?

A woman in Denver
watches a horse
leap through the air

goes home, can't sit, runs
to the public library and writes
surrounded by civil statutes and magazines

and what she creates is Greek Mythology.
These dreams are what anxious reason finds
locked in language screaming to get out.
The gods. The glad prevarications
of the poets. She is one. She rises
at sunset and goes into the street.
Mildly observed, she dines upon meat.

13 August 1993

MIDSUMMER PETUNIAS COLOR OF LENT

for Charlotte

As much of passion as the white wall
permits a sunshine to renew
the handiwork of time, bleach this, blur that
and the house stands new
pink as Browning in his prime
with whiskers and a map of Italy.
Here comes the world. A book
spread open to the riddle
one hopes to die before solving.
Since what is life without a mystery,
and so on. It is a rebus, a word
spoken only by pictures
pronounce out loud to understand.
Maybe. Blue waistcoat, black satin
lapels, snuff brown the coat and green
the clocks in his socks, a man alive.
I do not talk about his nether limbs,
safe from impudicity and remark.
Lawn glider in the shade, a statue
of the Madonna holding no child,
only a slim book, as if of poems or prayers,
though prayer is always wordier
than simple knowing is, isn't it. A lot
of water for just one fish. His eyes
move slowly side to side
in search of telling comparisons.
He finds the forest pressing all around
and knows it is America he's found,
no complicated ancient place
and all the sacred languages are dead.
Means lost. I speak Mohican
with my feet, he thinks, using a word
he would eschew in poetry.
How silly Shelley was, a case in point.
But he's right, a spirit walks us
and our walk is talking in this place,

we understand by moving
along the contours of the, not the
given, but the taken land.
The Indian's revenge is only this,
we have to stay here in this stolen yard
counting maple leaves and remembering
all the worldly differences back there.
Where the language came from
that even now slips out of his book.
Her book. Who is this saint, this virgin
of the pamphlet, this slim recidivist
of simple feelings, mother of whom?
One does not know. One samples
and supposes, mostly by color,
still amazed by the amplitude of flow.
The waters here below, our vanity.

13 August 1993

Here is a poem
unlikely
as a gazelle
resting on my shoulder

her long soft jaw
while she watches
what isn't raining.

13 August 1993

WHERE WE THINK WE ARE

This is where the rest of the apples went after Eden,
a valley intricate with peace, yet moneyful music
besets the civil mind. Unthwarted, married waterfowl
disclose wing by wing the pleasures of monogamy.
Nothing lasts but this intention, and that is all we need.
Has form, these vows we say, this word we stand by
when we do, has form. And having form, is matter.
And if we don't stand by it, that has some substance too,
a terrible pale fluid that stains the rug and smells of dog,
smears the chipped rims of our favorite cups.
Since even folk on their way to hell stop in for tea.

13 August 1993

