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Turns out I was nobody but me
a kind of eyelid on a greater eye
and mostly good for going to sleep.

15 September 1993

CELEBRITIES

As urgent as they are
the clams are quicker
scooting landwards
in the upwash of
what had once been
the Southern season
now a wind a crack
in the wood of the world
and this pours in,

doubt, fire, fear,
and savage Inconvenience
whose mirror
catches all our breaths
and asks us is it worth it,

this life, this enterprise.
It is September
and the drought persists
but somewhere the rain
irritates another
as the sun does here.
Unspeakable conspiracy of things!
Let me go back to the paper
and read of racier dismay,
distraught princesses
married by night to famous goons.

15 September 1993

MODERNISM

jealous nuns flounce off to their devotions

freed us from that
lines
which were scraps of seeing
disguised as something said

or upside down
again,

the tuneful nevers of old poetry.

16 September 1993

for Charlotte

The words don't mean,
her body means

held close
my face dark in her hair

needing the forgiveness of our time.

16 September 1993

The sound of ordinary rain
that rare Dawn Age music
the hurry before traffic
water-gravel, it's just night now—
in every period we get the art we deserve

Free Will Among the Natives

Some expedition found us
(took their time)
bound us by language & by hope
and let us lope
free-ankled through local space

confident we're too contentious
to weary ever of fighting with each other.
But if we ever did
o what enemies we'd be—
we could win back the galaxy.

17 September 1993

my hand is rusty
he spoke over the alphabet
Queen Elizabeth held her breath
and still he spelled her name correct
forming the letters in water
persuading them to stay—

this piece is called *A Body*
and you live in it till you're done.
Sometimes he lets them choose
the color of their hair.

17 September 1993

THE HORSE

As if there really were a hole in language and
into it could creep
the turbulent army of our intentions
and go to sleep. Until the word
got wheeled through the gates of Troy—
then out they come in drunkenness and dark
to annihilate the unexpressed,
an old man's children dying at his knees.

17 September 1993

WESTWARD THE COURSE

Westward the course
by binnacle bewrayed,

that West was waste,
our umber intended
was the shale of mind
sheet by leaf unpieced

split into the perfect dark unmade.

The one before beginning
ours still
and only still
the finding,

even if in hurry or in horror
you find the quiet seeing
through (suddenly!) the seeming

and you're there.

By resting (westing)
we just ape the god.
Not by vacations,
we sabbath-wearyans,
not by following the compass
as if to chase
wet-footed the fleet sun.

But by entering
the silent heart of language
we finally speak. Or:

West is: hie over from Thebes
into they call it the Necropole

where life begins

in certitude
following the breath.

Always, reverends, the breath goes west.

18 September 1993

[Playing off Bishop Berkeley's famous gesture — and he of all should have known better, Christ's Platonist. And doesn't it seem that such a piece as this comes into being for the sake of its commentary-to-be? Cuff notes for an ultimate address.)

Did you say Ultimate Artery
the run that starts in the heart
and never comes back

Or were we talking about something else
the girl who lived up Dutchman's Hill
the waterpipes the weather?

19 September 1993

MARRIAGE IS WATER

A glass
full of what water does to light

a river carrying everything, strong, strong,
a river struts by the broad city

a marriage is water

ocean going everywhere
touching every part of the world

a secret underground stream
running beneath every action of life

a quiet pond
with fish in it
in Japanese sunlight, fertilities, quietly wild.

for Bruce and Erica, 19 September 1993

WAKE-UP CALL

To be caught in the clarity
asking myself Is this a day?
Is this gold, this gold
ring around my finger?
Is this what men call being?

Because a cold morning comes
as a relief from terrible summer as
another kind of voice
lifted over the trees
warning me I have to reckon
with being one day
wordlessly awake.

Is do enough? Is do not better?

Nothing is seen to move
and then a vehicle goes by,
as the police say,
those abstract artists
of the numerable world beyond identity
and I feel in me a fine juvenile
resentment against government

safe enough in our modest oligarchy
where the Unhappy Few
rule the entertained in peace a while
and frantic missionaries of the real
yammer their poesies and sutras.

2.

I have traced the wordlessness
with which I woke

outward to some definition of the sleep
in which the words were lifted,
gypsy, out of my dreamless mind.

20 September 1993

BASKERVILLE

Shall this be the typeface
with which Catullus himself
came to the meek English
hinting iniquities?

What is found in the word
is less than the wind
but it freezes and seethes.
There is a remainder also

when the last word peels away.

20 September 1993

TRYING TO MAKE A WORLD WORTHY OF
BULGAKOV

And then the affronted editors
seize the fiddlesticks of all their poets
and smash them on the marble hipbones
of late Gilded Age statues left
in the umbrageous basements of museums
in Boston, Hartford, Salem
waiting for a revolution
that would value once again
the hard contours of the ancient easy.
Hoc est corpus tuum, Domine,
which I also have taken on.

20 September 1993

THE PARROT

If there were a picture of a bird here, we should see what the world of birds permits us to understand about the jungle The Jungle. There are animals there who listen quietly and carefully to the breathing of humans asleep in long houses made it seems of grass or leaves. These people in their dreams are reasoning into place the ordered practices (“religion,” “family organization,” “diet and nutrition”) by which their next day will be made to seem enough like yesterday to be understood. Thus with silence and dignity the future simply takes place. This is the dark land. Any dream is a forest of it. If we were looking at the bird, we would see a listener.

21 September 1993

THE CHASE

for Charlotte

Asking always what the moon is doing
the tree, the green people
who run away from me
and still look back over their shoulder
to make sure I keep slogging
towards them, animal
if trivial occasions,
intimate, eloquent, absurd

and make me bolder to reach them
whose evasions are beauty
and whose forests are without exception

silver rainlight amber sun show
everything is there. Green
I call them from their favored
kirtles and chlamyses and robes of state
furred only with shadow, their words
(one to a leaf and no end to them)
rivers, shadows, wines, winds,
horses, hobbies, thistles, all are green
and green the spinning-top they set to twiddle
and green the porches of the ruined cabin
they open finally for me, door and bed and kitchen
table at the end of my breath.

21 September 1993

The nearing (nibbling) quiet
or nuthatch on the tree or

a river through a city
only by the accident of history

Time has come and counted
and counted me out

I am Tulsa
my desires
gave me no room to grow
I hurried down the line they showed

one thing and another thing until
there was no more of me to want with

and I stopped.

Here is a picture of me doing it,
his hand on my waist
twirling me
that's me with the big smile

a little cowboy music
waiting to be played.

22 September 1993

BARLEY

Do you think they'll dry out or do
the grains —once they taste our water—
grow fat from us —mourning
doves over there in the thicket— the trunk
of the basswood beginning to dry —or
some things have only one set of instructions
and follow as far as they can —ferment—
ripen— die and grow another—
seasons fox us —are we of like kind?
Can I change my mind?

22 September 1993

They come nearer
it must be a design

2.
they want something
that is not me

3.
so I give them what I can't

22 September 1993

These are the councils we waited for,
a bunch of crows waiting on the lawn
for all my crumbs. My cars.
Wait me,

I am another
of your feather.
The black Imperium

for which the soldierboys were working
fell out of the reflections in their sunglasses
and burnt their mama's kitchens

scorch in snowlight
we were afraid of every sacred island
so came here

where nothing seemed to be waiting.
Except these crows.
Who are nobody I know.

Not the farmer, not the bullyboy from Thrace
who beats the girls every Friday night beneath the gates
the sacred gates of Troy!

(go in. go out. a meeter destiny
never found a wandering female Hebrew grammarian
fond of a good tale ((Homer)), did she?)

I have often thought there are too many boys in the world
not enough men, if ever, I see you
Todd Stottlemire, Juan Guzman,
you are Hector and Achilles, babies,
on the same team. Often in watching baseball
I have seen in the profiles of pitchers,

ah, the pitchers, those grandees,
those isolatoes! the lineaments

of the ancient heroes, Arjuna, Ajax, Achilles---

the gates are sacred because you, perfect One,
pass through and through them
leaving on the balusters your radiance

your wind of passage reassorts the dust.
Tremble, gemstones,
in a demon earth!

Yes, the heroes, whose profiles etch the local sky
with frowning self-absorption, with rage
against the fussy Fates, with mild loony boyish ignorance

and easy harmless smile.
They return to us on the pitcher's mound, they stare
blind with will

into the crotch of the catcher where the signals
contradict one another fast
and the batter waits like a whole army of criminals

trying to escape from the prison of the world.
O concentration of the southpaw's glance.
There is a barrier that no ball can pass.

A bad city we have made.
A bad animal sleeping at the door.
A cunning woman carrying away the city gates by night.

. . . 22 September

1993

I think this goes on, to speak of what makes the sacred so.

CAPSICUM

for Michael Lewis

Neighbors come and watch me open it—
hot peppers, all kinds, fresh
from Michael's garden: jalapeños,
tiny ruby Thai, cherry red and clumsy
Anaheims, slim waxy red Hungarians
and who am I? We are shocked by the variety.
Wrapped in paper napkins, an exploding
dinner ripens. The colors. The precise
form. The little cardboard box
that glows like Midnight Mass inside—
festival, friendship, study this:
we are saved by the strangest things.

23 September 1993

Age me a little, Make-up, today I'm being old.
And tomorrow with a Slovenian accent
I will lecture on extirpated folkloric customs,
bombed cathedrals, great auks and the strange
water wells hidden on the far face of the moon.
And then a day of silence to mark Sabbath
in case any gods or men are listening,
and then I put on the armor of invention
and stand all day long in the sky directing traffic.
the shadow and the bee, the holy sycamores
shivering beneath me in a dream of air.
Null moves. A semaphore on fire and a racing
train. An otter foodless on the shore.
It's the waiting kills you. And all those
people waiting for me to fall.

23 September 1993