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If they were casting around for it
they'd find it

a man made to look like horror
(at horror, we watched *Night & Fog*)

travelled. So we were in London together,
you and my red-haired wife and I

and it was country too, this town we got off in
a kind of suburban express to climb down from

on long iron stairs of the el station
to what I thought was nowhere

was the heart of the city
and then we were in some borrowed flat

on the borderland between Leicester Square and the forest
look at the blossoming neon the hope

of economic recovery
friends travelling to earth.

*

This measure does not teach me anything,
 this meter's out of ink, I pressed
on the back of your shoulders
 like a comrade, to make you feel better,
headache was it, or sudden doubt
 why were you grieving in warm sunshine
 of a London quiet
 maybe a Sunday even
when the song creeps out of moldy churches and
the car lights are coming down the hill?

We never go anywhere on Sunday.
We are a dream. We are cups
moving to the lips. Our hands
rest in sunlight faintly smoking.

We who inherited only a mirror
salute you who inherited a rock.

There is bitter running in this world,
hurtfang and winter and

the stories do not help us understand
our own, we run to them
because we know this weather so deep

the tragedy of being who I am.

O poets
you should read a
book.

*

Swept out of the subway at dawn
one has no friend but the sky

because I am shy
she had to teach me where to place my hands

though well knew I how to roar
but knew no other thing—

can you write the history of your teeth,
your own teeth one by one
how they grew in and fell away and came again
with pain or easily
and stayed, some or all of them, or none,
how you lost each one?
Can you tell the history of your hands?

For mouths and hands are secret places,
palaces,

beneath his mask the dentist's face
is Thoth's beak or a hawk from high heaven

and every handshake sealed you in some pact—

all of them,
 history of touch.

 We stood
on Parliament Hill to watch the congress burn,

touch, teeth, the common
insinuations of public language
I must here block or disembowel

to speak a cureless jargon of my own

by which a new thing's heard

and new hands caress the amice of your skin,
shoulder to shoulder even
like a bad song

forward into the imaginary town.

23 December 1992

THE EMBODIMENTS

for Charlotte

are with us
to be sure
what we can
by already being be

*in this knowing
is the highest bliss*

where this
is the knower's
own

they arrive
at midnight
in stony places
the stable the valley
between foothills
rising to the pass
where no one can breathe

and it is cold
with politics and war
and the animals
who warm them
will not live long

into a murderous universe
they descend
to be what we are
so we can know what we are

we are other
than we seem
only who we are.

Christmas Eve 1992

When we are caught
in the Embarcation
we meet a distinguished
foreigner whose eyes
are like a palm tree
shading Orion from our sight
straight overhead
on this winter night.

24 December 1992

CHRISTMAS HOUSE

The name of the flower
that seems to be the same as itself
stamen or what is it
arising from the waxy heart-shaped
I suppose it's the corolla

brittle flower
now can winter know us
sealed in the mystery of house
where our compact torsos
secrete all round us
the space of mind

2.

I understand this is the Nineteenth Century still
the Century of Comfort,
Dr. Morton's anesthetic surgery
and such soft chairs
horsehair and scarlet leather and

we rest in this opulence
a sofa!
a paradise of indoor weather
where the spectators are
sporting with each other on the loveseat
while the All-Seen Eye regards them

this gentle nescience is our mind.
Christmas Eve. Four Jimmy Stewart movies
greet the birth of God.

Surely we have a better antiphon than this,

in the Dharma-ending time of merit slight
and quick deteriorate the qualities we brought

empty handed from life to life—

the comforts of language
console us for the fragmentary real.

25 December 1992

THE DRUNKARD

who lost his key in the alley
looks for it in the street
because that's where the light it.

What we're afraid to do in Bosnia
we bring to Somalia.
A good deed, indeed,
but where are the others,

that open up the gate of Paradise?

25 December 1992

HOMELESS PEOPLE

From Çatal Hüyük to the Armory shelter in Manhattan
nine thousand years.

In an age when all estate is Real
the only protest is to have no house.

25 December 1992

La Littérature secondaire

Transmission is about itself. Deprived of other gasps of the machine, it proposes no one, it tries to cure common colds, it stands above the Ravine of the Alzette marvelling. How small a trickle of water slices a park through a city, a canyon through a massif. Little does it take to make a burnished nose decant the dubious vintages of the head -- that *testa* or old pot from which some of our glory and much of our woe ariseth. Amen. Can you what I say? Transmission transmits, there is no object. We live in an intransitive universe if the truth were known. All effect is illusory—only the doer suffers or endures the consequences of what appears to him (and only as long as it appears to him) his action. La Tete. *Kamboreke no galama, kamore so tekim* said the Tchadic Fragment, “the language of the people of the Blessing is hidden in children's ears, the language of death talks out loud.” So perhaps to close the books, as Christmas closes them on the year, and beckons glad-handed out towards the snow, a miraculous vacancy rife with beginnings. Not another word. Speak! The poem rises from the scratching of birds among your seed.

26 December 1992

13.

It could not cut the vanity the haughtiest
Zoa the thorn-throne she sat impassive on above us
moving merely (meager) in the precincts of the giant's chest
this body me. I have who hurts. I aim lowest with heat
and high to take each sunset clear. There is
a sundog I see through the trees. There is a language
I beat. The musical instrument (that air-scoured blanched
remarkable ribcage) tongued out a sterling music
to which the stately masochists of Urban Life did step
a flaming and a Fleming mingled, up-ankled numbly to receive
the Gift of Feeling. Take this, and this. The Gang of Five
have you in their clutches, and the Dark Masker
is still far across the rolling green who comes to save you.
Vana, escra noa companiya! No co nyitu samana!
It's all that endeth barely. It could not cut. It sang
and sinking in that lake of sound his last poor real
stretched under the pellucid emerald of her water
until she saw me. A man carved out of echoes.
And when he comes to right me, that Eight Ball
unseen wandersman, he'll cheer you ruby too,
the tolling bell in the warm center of his eye.
So dark. A black man you would say to watch the words
in all their honesty under (sudden!) standing your sense.
My stance is fire. The thing that stands inside the stone
causing the transparency of the whole, and that clear
intense flame inside the stone the wise call *water*.

26 December 1992 [A section of *The Physiology of William Blake*]

Try to keep this in mind
reminders from the prompter's box
breed doubt in low quarters
but meant well
has after all a certain
effect. Berlin, the Spree boxed in ice.

26 December 1992

Thing fall.
That they fall
or ember
kindle

again
to be a child
of fire
and breathe

a dangerous light!
Everything rises
without returning.
The change.

The wink of an eye.

27 December 1992

DARJEELING

The tea factory
bearing like the mill
the laudable extensions of the hill
where the Nepali women
straggle up the slope
with only sixty pounds
of this and that
balanced on their napes

the labor of the settlement
and Adam's curse.
You see his footprint here
a faint trace of it
inside the larger deeper track the Buddha left
when he too passed this way

in the second or third week after his enlightenment
on his way up to Tibet,
the first full human of this age.

It is done
with seeing and not seeing,
with knowing and ceasing to know.
It is done with mind

and mind is nothing, never, nowhere and all.

27 December 1992

FIRST LESSONS IN SWEDISH

When someone comes across the room
all the way from the other
side of her arm and holds

the air out to you
simply
like a glass

and you take it
and it holds
the both of you

in one long conversation
not even your eyes
can eavesdrop on then

then you have met.
It is the only language
we need to know.

28 December 1992
for Mary Backlund

One ages into things, the way morning becomes afternoon
losing nothing by it, darkening a little
around the edges of the sky. But night's
a gaudy gift too, with all its distant splendor.

Night's a gaud. Enough. The old houses in Tivoli
by the railroad track console the river.
Occult swallows dive into the dark.

29 December 1992

Traits. 5.

Grey mere centers Adam's seed. Put your hand whole. From this headland a habit. Every night the goddess touch him. This by way of oak, all brown the winter. All elm the lost. See, he remembers too far.

Then the sparrows woke up from the river. As things seem, a blackbird too frequent. Then a wave on the water, or is the water. What is the difference between what it is and what it does?

Keep wanting there to be the answer. The picture is a stripe of umber. That is, the picture of a picture is what a head sees inside itself when it thinks with its inner eye of what it would look like if its own eye worked outside and looked back over, here, where the guessing game is always going on. Brown, and touch me. Green and soon come back. Yellow is whose favorite flavor.

Picture of a picture. A Pict. A thing to remember a thing to eat. A time to eat. Remembering is like a vivid forgetting, that is all. The girl held in his arms will not survive, he will not survive either, Alaska is far with its strident young housewives caught in someone's image. An image. A man with blue hands from striking repeatedly a demanding surface. A man with mud on his hands from balancing on a slippery path. Wash with oak leaves. Wash with maple.

Not all the colors have been drunk yet. There are still parabolas and azimuths. It is possible to describe with exactness what will not be experienced. Perhaps description obviates event. That would be the nature of mathematics. He wrote "There is in the fine print of a cheap Greek grammar more beauty than in the Louvre." He had never been in the Louvre, and now that he has, he's forgotten his conjugations, especially the μ verbs. On the bridge nearby he watched a woman walk into the wind away from him, so he walked in the wind that had just left her. Somehow this pleased and excited him. He was eighteen and could smell nothing. The feel of wool. The color of a clarinet, some pieces by Alban Berg somebody was playing at Juilliard

— this is like a collage, see, like a Joseph Cornell nude made of the color blue and a few stars and a scrap or two of girl. He was older than he looked. It is all right to say the names, a name is almost everything and certainly a thing. A thing. A thing is a flag of a lost nation. A thing is the shadow of some going. Somely going, or goingly gone. Or by. A thing is gone by.

Photography has taught us to accept cropping. Pieces of things. *Recadrer le monde*. What we're looking at with such obsessive fascination, the eye does the cropping for us. *Recadrer*. When we look at something everything else even all the else of it itself fades from focus and is like a smoke or shadow drifting this afternoon over the marsh. They said fog was general over the Eastern seaboard.

That tells why the priest wears the chasuble and why his fingers drip with oil and who is speaking inside the cup. When the child was found, the pots and pans and teacups in the house when picked up gave out the low deep drone of conch shells blown by skillful musicians somewhere up above the earth. The property of a cup is this: that the deep of the dome is always up, the cup is always the sky, and when someone that holy gets born, the sky speaks, and sounds like a shell. So you see it is not the ocean you hear in any seashell, but the sky. But you have to listen close and put your ear into it, hole to hole, like Delphi. But in that house in Lhatok that day it was everywhere, the sound of the sky, from every curve expressed.

We wanted to express ourselves by staying up all night and touching every side of it. They called us the People who Eat the Dawn. Dawn eaters, we slipped along each other's skins, and travelled the dark silent subways of our clothes. To find the city hidden inside the city — the only place you could ever find it. Hide a leaf in a forest, hide the city in a city. And when he finally, years later, got to the city he found it a green and open place, with marshes that tended to the sea, and brownish birds with speckled plumage who kept their beaks pointed at the heart of the sky.

29 December 1992

EX ORE MACHINARVM

When the spell-check finds TIVOLI
it suggests
changing it to SHOVEL.

How well it knows us,
this routine.

29 December 1992

THE ELEPHANT

for Charlotte

The must of things, the elephant,
Jane mixing tea and coffee
Billie pouring cream until
the coffee overflowed the cup and saucer
slopped into lap, the accurate
attentions we bring to our excess,
the world, the tongue tip touched
to seal the unwilling letter, the hand,
the elephant, the compulsion
to be on the side of things
against the mere dying, the elephant,
the things, the must of things
marsh mist and my elbow winter rough,
is there a privilege to feeling,
the elephant the compulsion to feel
anything and so we call
and call, and call what goes on
in the blank of the heart and the screen
of the head and the box of the breast
our feelings. The elephant. The feelings.

30 December 1992

NEW YEARS LETTER TO THOMAS MEYER

The attempt to give pleasure by gasoline
is to go

*

Standing in air
in our socks and understanding
the one thing not to be:

those ambitious Americans in Victorian novels
always so full of vim and ugly bounce.

Not be that. Not have
a career have a lute
as it may be,
a harp in hand

or hand cupped to the lips
to speak at midnight

and let the ocean listen in its endless lust
if it cares to, if they

care to hear.

*

Understanding Arnaud
who swam against the stream,
his pale face grown red
from the effort of striving

his sinews to accommodate
so slow an entrance

backwards into the world.
The glory. Backsiders,
face to the cormorant wind.

To have no ambition
but this feeling.

*

And when the Jesuits got through with him
he was fit for nothing
but poetry and Africa

and there the vultures waited
gentle critical persons stooped to their cleansing task—

in sequined dresses, in sailor suits,
it is time for all the fractals to come home.

2.

I wanted this to be collaboration
like the thing in the bed,

a headache
on a wet spring morning
that happens to be the last day of the civil year,
tell me
the omens in your house,

your wet brown leaves
almost black under four days rain
the general mist—

the profits of TV. I am writing these days
under my old name
the one that fell out of the sky

a heel and a hearing
and a heron over your head
too, my friend—

too many imperial edicts
have spilled our years

since we last met

and we persist in love
still trading on the first mistake.

3.

Tradescantia, they call it,
though ours died last year,

Wandering Jew, named for John
who was the Queen's
voluptuary of uncommon fruit,

no fruit on this one,
spindly and elaborate,
a plant made all of going.

4.

We could drive south
or you east
 (how is your opera?)
we could hang up
big jade-green placards
 on the e-mail
and wire each other bulletins of bliss.

Is the bliss with you?
Lord how well you write,
 and how much universe
you have wantonly declared
blond boy, with the flick of a finger
 to be there
instant with your say-so!

5.

It is New Years Eve day Nineteen ninety two
forty two fahrenheit degrees
and still everything is beaded with wet light
the arbitrary hydrogen and nothing stirs.

O soft and comprehensive light
I have worshipped all my life
the skin of you you share
with everything I've ever seen.

6.

We had to mow our ambition
and from its sweet grass so cut down
(fescue, rye, kentucky blue)

we bound up sheaves of hay
to feed our simple beasts the years.
Live on prophecy

alone, live on love.
We worked for the sake of the poem alone,
gave our lives to write it

and the gift was accepted
by those articulate energies whose job
is to receive such things

in endless answering.
What other hope did we have
but to speak our mind

and find it everyone's?

*

This is a New Years Letter, isn't it, as if we were being Auden again and someone still had the right to speak. But none to answer. Ethiopia, Iceland, Spain — those unfashionable 1930s names.

This is me trying to praise you, and console you for the dismal but natural habit of the world: that hears without attending, that shovels in the food we proffer without ever saying grace. Don't worry, I'm trying to say, the year is always beginning, Janus sees everyone, our bodies are immense with feeling. Don't worry, nature has nothing to say except what we say. Thank you, I'm trying to say, thank you for what you say.

31 December 1992

LAST POEM

The year's last
word
is for Charlotte
and says forever
forever. This word
is not abstract
or witty. It is a dark
river
through a large city,
rats live near it
rafts go down.
There are industrial
environments
the lyric eye
does not understand.
Metal
is to be a joy, smoke
a kind of color.
Things are made by it
and go on.
With my hands
joined and easy
on the warmest New Years
of my life I
wish us forever.

31 December 1992
for Charlotte