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"We see what comes"

The analysis
is stress

where the voice
sierras

oceans
night.

There are silences
in things

I need to live
a letter

from a dead
brother a linden leaf

anything
to let us fall.

27 August 1992

EPITAPH FOR RK

The most lucumbrious prose by parthenonical interpellations
constentedly lumbricating the dense texture of silence. Nothing
said nothing ventured. Say it all, Sion, and Turnon-les-Bains!

27 August 1992

for Charlotte

Apt in semaphore, a child signs to himself in the subway window. Himself. His murky faces look back in as the well-lit train jounces through the lightless tunnels under the city. There is going, even going fast. Rush of wind in front of train, roar of train in tunnel. Occasional blue lights flare past. But for all the going there is nowhere gone. No somewhere else. You get on the train in the city and get off in the city, and the crowd is the same, they look at you the same, the fear is the same. Hurrying. His face looks back at him now, looking no different even to him from all the other faces in all the crowds. But here there is no crowd, just a black window and one single face looking back at him. The train is stopped in the tunnel. His hands wave in the reflection with the meaningless deliberation of fish swimming in the dark.

27 August 1992

COMMUNIQUÉ ON A QUIET DAY FROM THE FRONT

I will accept chance, because chance is just what happens, but I will not try to exploit some hypostasized Chance as an engine to speak in some special art way. Chance already speaks. Speaks through me and thee, and we are all orators of that oldest theology, and I preach whenever I speak. Because we speak what chance lets into our heads.

(Subtract yourself from what has been written, and the result is literature. Subtract yourself in the act of writing and the result is gibberish. Fortunately, lots of us enjoy gibberish — it is the lingua franca of a ghost time.)

27 August 1992

for Charlotte

Suppose Cuchullain one day looking at his thighs
heard a strange conversation in an island jabber
he barely understood. He pressed the soft hollow
on the inner surface of the thigh above the knee
you see when seated. and heard it clearer:
star talk and sea urchins in the hand
and a taste of pepper in his mouth, black pepper
and one Corinthian lemon she brought home
from all her ventry. Suppose a hero
has to hear. Suppose the only friend
is what his body says, Caput Draconis
in the first house, he listens to the nape of his neck
o the skin knows more than any brain does
skin o soft unremembering tissue of awareness
endlessly experiencing and talking in its sleep!
And so all heroes go glad to war
like old philosophers anxious to debate.
Each one with his blows remarking, reporting
and the other listening with his blood.
The lyrical continuity of inner consciousness
(never represented in Homer or Bible)
is just a dream inside a dream. No one can hear it.
What we hear is what our bones are saying,
your bones pressed against mine.

27 August 1992

WHAT WE SAW ON THE MOUNTAIN

for Charlotte

Strange yellow campion
yellow rattlebox red willow-herb
called épilobe, and blue scabious

why shouldn't this low flower
cure my itch,

the letch of naming and the lust of touch
things we saw there, the primary things of all

I do not cherish my opinion,
I cherish that thunderstorm over Geneva
while the fountain was still throwing
its sixty foot answer to the Uranian ones,

insert this water
fast into the folds of sky.

27 August 1992

for Charlotte

Thinking about the things we can do
to help each other

the drone
all day long in the sky we call the sun
waiting to be born

the inconceivable
nature of what is not apparent,
metaphysics of the dark.

We can answer the phone.

28 August 1992

for Charlotte

Celan felt language
had done it had
to be purified no
something before
language failed
and that
must be birthed
not to dismiss the verb
absterge the noun.

28 August 1992

PROTHALAMION FOR S & J

1.

To celebrate
that absence
of a distance
— a miracle

of abnegation
like a black something
nesting
on a blue something else

2.

Behold the marriagers
come forth in the summer morning
and every couple yearns its Moyle to marry by
river murmur among lapwing scurry
cool vaults of the Museum sounding
crow calls from Everest.

The world is one. Marriage
is the only other number.

3.

A small river is best for weddings
— you have to be able to see clear
the face of someone on the other side
who will turn out to be you
at the end of your life
testing this moment and smiling

you have to hear the current
not be drowned out by it
because that hectoring theologian the Heart
has plenty to say on such a day
beneath the societal avowals and the in-laws
self-conned for a moment into supposing
passionate embraces subside into a social unit
neat as a curtain sighing in the window.

Marriage is not the least
of the strange things love makes us do.

28 August 1992

ADVT

for Charlotte

And where will you be then my suburbanites
when the ship sails out of the mountain
and the suspicious voyagers in whiskers and furs
hear the song of the penguins flying far above
no humans had ever heard till now

and where will you be when the three moons
dance around the radar mast
and the clouds come printed with news of the day
and flowers smell like shoe polish and iron floats?
This is what she'll give you if you open the dark.

28 August 1992

THE GIFT

for Charlotte

1.

Where we will be is in the power of the gift.
She will give us all we need to be confused, alarmed,
instructed, manifolded in that curious vacancy
that passes with us as paying attention.

2.

When you receive a gift you are in another country
and have to live there while the gift is new.
Time warps the gift back to your own house
then you are home. As if it had never been gone.
Still it sits on your mantelpiece, grey-blue, hard,
bearing still the oil of the giver. At twilight it gleams.

28 August 1992

for Charlotte

Even poets get older.
But the voice does not
they listen to and keep repeating
as well as they can
— though usually with diminishing fidelity
as the years pass and their own
projects grow more intricate and loud

but not always.
Young poets are wonderful
because they're mostly animals
wanting and fearing and that's all.
Then they can listen
clear. How loud the voice is then
pointing at what they hope or dread!

Sometimes the old
remember to be animal.
Sometimes the old remember to be young.

29 August 1992

FLEURET

for Joey

The blade of it more flexile than
an archer seeking the high quarry
see what I have captured from the cloud
a sort of ice a spoon full of vinegar
that turns the stomach silver
blackberries trampling the inerter hedge
unshaved they hurry towards their doom
because a flag snape in the breeze of too much talk

and we greeted them in their wiggle and their prance
kissed both cheeks and doubted the red cathedral
porter in waxy collars their gold chains drooping
opened up the aisles with ivory staves
until we too could hear the music of the Changing
before our ears the concave mystery appalled
to the tones of snapping fingers smell of stone
see here is where they put their god to death
here is a friend waking him with the right word.

30 August 1992

MORZINE

for Charlotte

Between the flag of High Savoy
(white cross on a red field
like Switzerland but expansive,
reaching all the edges,
dramatic, like a church
with incense or a cloud with sun)

and the familiar flag of France
(the blue white becoming red
that still tries to lib us
from the calm of the.salon)

there flies the flag of Morzine
orange at the staff and yellow in the fly.

We sit and drink (coffee; orange pressé)
and wonder what this bicolor means,
should we have had lemonade and orange juice,
blood oranges and gold,

the flag a little like the papacy's but no hat no keys
as if we had elected to Peter's chair
a Chinese Buddhist in love with Emptiness

and no sins and nothing to forgive.
Just the youthful Dranse shouting below the old arched bridge
and poor Jeanne with her dyed hair
mumbling incoherent over her cigarette and beer,
she who had once been the helmet maker's gorgeous wife.

30 August 1992

FLAGS

for Nathaniel Tarn

"He is his own worst enemy"
they would say of a man

then what flag should he fly
in his suicide sky
stuck to the top of the mast on his schoolhouse
jack staff of his foundering catamaran?

This is a heraldry.
We have to decide
before the Revolution
which colors to plant
in the generous earth,

our revolution must be crystal
must run new axes
through the vanishing light
and fix it, here,
around us, amorous,
and all the calculus
of political contrivance
must find us at last in our own places
so the beginning can begin.

Benjamin of Tudela was led through a door
opened beneath what he called An Image.
Those who in their devotions etc.
refer to that image welcomed him
at the bottom of a flight of seventeen mossy steps
and he was shown —through a gilded iron grating—
a room empty of everything but a strange sound

he may have understood this as the language of a star
long ago spoken out loud (Sinai) now
in the deep far-away subterranean loggia
still echoing dimly, but daily, on earth. A star.

So put the star on the flag, only one.
How many points has a star?
Pascal. What is your favorite color?
Abyss. If there were a wall
what rock would you be? Water.
I would be ruby
like my father's ring.
If you were a bird what song would they hear
as they carry Jack's casket
again and again from the caisson to the pit
until we are weary of saying good-bye?

And all we ever really saw was a flag
handed to a woman in black and any
wit in the garment center can sew you
a flag for any tragedy that you like,
Ireland, a dead man with a glass in his hand
France, a race car driver smoking a pipe
Germany, a woman weeping in her underwear
Poland, a mountain with a bride talking to the sun

all we saw were the tears we wept
and the world glistened through them
and the early winter afternoon was very ordinary

who do we lose, a name
(nom d'un nom!) a young
man who now will never grow old?
In Sherwood Forest they thought
such stuff, and by the damp mirages
of the Maghreb she waited for him
at the end of the dry ravine,
dead for the dead,

film for your camera. Press
the button and leave the lens open.
In a while he climbs out of the tomb and goes away
but his name's still buried in the stone.
The ground. The mill
of unanimity. I touched her
on the sparrow of the thigh,

she flew into my hand.

See, I have laid out all the evidence
in the great crater of light that spreads out
like the rose-choked apron of a Mexican madonna
between the Mountains of Blood and the Teeth of Annwfn,

the busy offices of Hell
whose local branch is
this random antechamber of the mind
the Thinking and Desiring Place
and that should speak the flag—
Azure, a hand proper reaching for a star.

It has defeated himself. The light
comes to him wherever he goes.
And it is good light, milk soft,
shed for him and for many
before the foundation of the world.

And it is his light, our light,
the only place that's dark
is inside his grasping fingers.

30 August 1992

for Charlotte

And not to trust my mind
is also crime

the magnitude
of the reproach
is infinite
like blaming God
as we all do

the knower
is an inference
from some act
of knowing

as is the known

To doubt the mind
a blasphemy
I understand
this this morning
on the stairs

when for a reason
of their own
my fingers let
a blue handkerchief fall.

31 August 1992

for Charlotte

The room that's left
for things
I've never done
before

the manifest
urgent
the hidden needs

I know this
out of a mountain
the way a shadow comes
and light's
a part of it.

31 August 1992

FOUNDATIONS

for Charlotte

What is the foundation of the word?
On top of Les Chavannes we found a brown goat with 4 horns.
What color were Eurydice's eyes?
A pale grey green best for seeing in the dark.
Where did the mind first begin to know itself a thief?
In London, in the museum, watching the frieze of the Parthenon.
What color was it then?
The white itself was gone, the woman held my hand.
If honey left an ash in sunshine
it would be this stone, and all the remembered
bodies that passed by, shadow
of a procession moving slow in ancient sunlight.
Before the world changed.

The foundation
is something seen
some answer
fleshed like a shoulder out of silence.
Picnic on the word
an Arab calm.
Along the Serpentine we were lovers
as geese mate for life.
This life.
And you stay the color you are born.

The patriotic worries now doesn't it,
all those countries they think we are
an ice-shaver in a summer cabin
waiting for a party fifty years ago
before we understood the far side of the Moon,

O Moon I worship your light on my hands
not tonight and not tomorrow
you comma in heaven
but soon the full word comes,
the borrower in her yellow silver clothes.

What is the foundation of the flesh?
Water sluicing up the pebbled beach
—you can see Martha's Vineyard ten miles off—
there are wild roses as they say galore
and a dozen kinds of waterfowl.

Imagine a map you studied in a distant country
of local topography: how to walk up the hill.
You want to read it now
though the little rocky path is four thousand miles away
from this word, a little X to show where people killed each other,
a little Christian cross to mark
an old stone building where you can get out of the sun.

In the Cloister of the Abbey of Abondance
a wandering Italian painter covered the walls
with frescoes from the life of the Blessed Virgin.
We stood before the Flight into Egypt
knowing that this painter knew more about exile
than any other handler of the theme.

Her face is made of going
and the child's afraid to sleep.

Charlotte and I look up at the faded wall
on the fiftieth anniversary of the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup of Jews.
She read me an account by a survivor
whose mother looked back once as they dragged her away.

31 August 1992, St Jean d'Aulps