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EVOLUTIONARY ETUDE

Wise Darwin fumbling at the outside of the door
the karma of inly-motivated selection
whereby we change
 into the motivated form—

we are
what we did.
And he stood there
in the Encantadas
knowing nothing, or only
 how far he could go,
to trace
 the changes that are us,
 to trace
and still stand outside the dark door,
to work with mind and not see mind,

to walk but not walk on earth.

Maria Callas is beginning the great Act II mad scene
from *I Puritani*—
England like any island
is mostly about revenge — Darwin's
papers in the University Libraries his magazines
inscribed in margins with the latest guesses,

quick local bus of mind
rehearsing
 what can never be obvious

enough sunlight
on the squirrels and the finches
my egg glistens on its little saucer
close I suspect to just right
—fluent cadmium stable titanium—
yes just perfect
and now the little spurts of crimson
—tabasco between friends—

that upright town
whose suburbs

are hell and heaven
and we in between
middle-people
safe in the dragon's coils

gene-maps, squirrel
chatter, rattle
of Lionel electric
trains around the tree

our limbs our wings our empery
constantly changing
in the unspoken motive
of what each whole life speaks.

8 December 1992

Sitting before the throne of Tara
and asking her green shadow to reveal
just one moment the silent jungle
inside the onlooking mind

asking her to be what she is
she opens her hands to show us
our own eyes looking at her
for I am all seeing and you

are everything I see.

8 December 1992

An elegance
across the bay
too well one remembers
sound of sunrise

they called it
the gulls arising
to occupy
one more time

the citadel of air.
The world is owned
before one enters,
the bleak inscription

stands full tonight
over these sacred
white pines
in the shadow

of ourselves
for once we see
an hour the loom
of what we are.

9 December 1992

is marmalade sunrise and a white boat—

You are in me like a crossword puzzle
I can't make a move without impinging on your sense,
your lustrous evidence.

Kiss parting night encapsulate.
Another time I will go back and cover my tracks.
Traces. Cats do dogs don't.

Certain exhausted words betray your letter
past all the kindly pleasures of the sense—

how we bathe in each other
—a shadow sinking in a shadow—
and do get wet but don't get clean.

10 December 1992

What is he? Baseball teams and flags
of all the nations and on the outfield
grass a book lying open to some Greek
pages whiffling in a hot Missouri breeze
carrying from far-off woods the scent of girls.

11 December 1992

Chamber of it
the loss
incarnated as a gain
a foot of snow
over the region of dun birds

by the castle of cars sliding off the road
the moat that waits
beside every universe
to contain our fall
the subtle miracle of prosperous evidence

shall I wait to make the obvious mistake or
keep
quiet like the birds around the feeder
seeder keep
the necessary fluency of silence?

12 December 1992 14:20

Measure the flowering of the Masonic Temple the prose
of the town council as recorded in the weekly (comes out Thursday)
presence of The Weekly Fact --you could never mistake it
for anything less or more-- this archaic wheatland
broken over the knee of the earth until from snowstorm to tropics
there is nothing in the sky but sky. This believes us.
There are several yellow pencils clutched in the blind child's paws
he likes the feel of them in his teeth especially under the right
dog tooth pressing down into the yellow shaft
an indentation he can find later with the tip of his subtle tongue
ready as it is, as he is, to say anything that comes into his head.
Language is what comes out of our mouths, though we
are not strictly relevant to the deeds of Rhinebeck New York
where these transactions just came up out of the ground
to affray us with midwinter terrors-- the light has not yet
decided to be born. We are not here, here
is not the landscape that plurals know, here is one man
(me) against everybody else and them against me. I call myself me
in this context, though my true name is somewhere entirely else.
Something with yellow pencils and jars of coconut oil
solid at room temperature except in tropical boudoirs,
something with magic markers and rosary beads made from Irish horn
that have hung for thirty years over my bed without a prayer.
If you can call a bed a place where no one sleeps.

12 December 1992

AFTER THE HEAVY SNOW

Every branch
has its trace
of light against
a darker sky
it seems but still
that's where the light
comes from
to gleam along them

bushes and branches and traces
incredulous geometry of trees
analyzing the last light
into lines, lines
which are light
twisted to pass
through the dark of silence
as if something here

never stopped talking to us.

12 December 1992 18:46

THE ETYMOLOGY

I was telling them about ink how ink
is from a burning or is a burn
in the white vulnerable skin of paper
made by deliberation, alchemists
boiled it out of oak galls
until they had a strange colorless juice
that seared the filaments of cloth
felted to make paper. These lines
remembered everything we said.
Later blue or black got added
to the juice so we could see it flow
and understand that every word we said
that way would last if not forever
then at least longer than we will, we sayers
of such mysteries, and why
is it so important, what we have to say,
so important we tear down trees to say it
like drunken Vikings raging in the birch woods
while the sea is rushing constantly away?

12 December 1992 19:12

Perception is structure enough.

---Gerrit Lansing

Some kind of orchestra is playing
vacuum cleaner hoses and alarm clocks
and the blat of southern ministers
preaching empty words to sleeping people.
And there is the silence of the snow
notorious, and there is the whistle
of the pen writing a letter to your friend
you may get around to mailing. And the sea
coming in to Jersey at this hour,
high tides of storms and tear your house in half
and trees bent down. And the bleroom
bleroom of the gas oven kicking in
to roast that animal. And the fluorescent buzz.
Music is always so adequate isn't it,
an archipelago in an endless sea
of formless going on and on. An island heals.

12 December 1992 20:00

CROPPING

for Charlotte

These people are looking at us
from a hillside where a boat
lies under canvas and the sea
looms at the edge of the picture.

These define the life: an image
with boundaries of its own.
Scarcely noticed, these also
hem us in, not just human fences

but the unimaginable edges of things
themselves forming ever new
continuities beyond the furthest
reaches of what we can bear

to see or think about. Or touch.
These people are very close,
they touch us with their eyes.
We say: O that is us

this spring. On the island.
In the sea. We were looking
into the camera, into the act
of itself seeing itself. And we saw.

13 December 1992



And what your body is
you are

and what the gates of Virgo guard
against all abstraction from
your fleshly power

your soft earth
your private mathematics.

13 December 1992
for Charlotte

LES BISES

provoke scarlet
smiles
skyscape a blue
erection
over the fallen city

rebuilding doesn't help
except people

the animal of the place
is wounded, Berlin
in drizzle,

greed is at least a highway,
a hurry.
Finally
the animal
of place
is all we have.

14 December 1992

STRANGE

day out the door: 15° and a fine
luminous mist everywhere
light abundant with no hint of sun or sun's yellow

fine steel, a gothic grey, milk
of cathedrals, a car moves down Cedar Hill
like a tear on an old man's cheek.

So cold the mist. We live by observation.

15 December 1992

IN THE WAIST WORLD

You meet people in the Waist you don't know how long they'll be here where they'll go. Which way anybody's going, even you. He many move off to your right past the icy steps of the all-night diner and get to be a bishop in three seasons. Or slew foot his way left and dodge bullets all his days, inhaling the cantankerous green smoke that is never quite legal. Even here nothing is legal. O thin the skin. Thin between virtue and bewilderment. Thin between air outside and the endless melodrama inside your body. How strange we are, people, that a touch breaks the law!

als flotter Geist

doch früh verwaist

psyched-up orphans in hurried periplous

to know the world
and not find it bleak—

o subway subway never get away from you
your cool tile at 4 A.M. my sweetest lover's touch

What beasts we are to doubt
the virtue of our beast our meat or wool
tangled with glory

wherever we go
the sun's caught in our hair

buoyant,
soon unparented,
from the earliest touch of light on us
we live alone

and so they call us merry, liberal, also gay,
aimless faggots of Bay One

and around us skin stretches, how slim
to stand between the wave and land,
how lean the portion of a common world
each wit is issued,
each enough,
don't you,

to catch the light and swallow it?

You meet people in the Waist, the tight danger zone between the
daytime city and the place where They go home to via decent
subway evenings, to the dog and television and other namable
intimacies

leaving us in the Waist

writhing in the clutch of
the love that has no name to dare.
The Zone. The Threadbare Chasuble.
The Blue Light District. The Savage
Playground, the Undeveloped Photo,
Heartless Park, the Chastity Belt.

And here we are. The narrow strait
between behavior and crime, between
keeping myself in my skin and my skin in my clothes
and every outer world you space you galaxy
spurting undrinkable past my hungry lips,
all crime (Bataille is right!) is coitus,
a going in and a forgetting,

ecstasy and endless sleep.

This is winter's lair
where homeless ones
flout the mathematics of the civil,
insisting on their sacred agony of apart, apart
that winter fragrance,
and all the passing women wear it too,
the new Chanel reek called Touch Me Not

for I am just as scared as you are, alone, unbrave,
hurrying to the Judgment Seat of God
with all my atheist convictions

held like last week's news against my chest

in the bitter wind we do to us.

 We make men outlaws
 in fear we turn away
from what is common,
 never recover
the simple kindness of to touch.

Boundary keepers, we walk the sullen precincts of our flesh
selling cheap and buying dear
and never satisfied,
how could we be when everything at last tastes just like us?

15 December 1992

CHARM FOR A NEW HOUSE

for Pat and Marla

Barely visited the wood
however old
itself is fresh
to you and good

a screen of wheat
as if the whole prairie
in its season will shade
the dust at your feet

a hat in the sky
will fill your ears
with urgent music
to think by

and then the door
will hold you
in its arms and the sun
will polish the floor

and oh my God
I've been writing about doors
all my life and never
have I ever had

enough to please me
of going out and coming in
and for you at last let
a multiplicity

understand your hours.

In a house

every silence

is the night of power

every word is a way.

15 December 1992