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Easy to sound colloquial, just think
of your uncle and talk to him. OK,
somebody else's uncle, no need
to be picky. You're full of contradictions,
an opera with no music in it.

Then it was evening, and the Athenians
were shivering in the aspen groves—
it was one of those nights when nothing
worked, even pain was unreliable.

Not a toothache in the whole army,
just a young understanding moon
perched on the steam-laundry smokestack.

And in those days you and I still
had the sense to say our prayers to her.

12 September 2008

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all the words today left
in the web of the hours

something old about now
something blue inside

all this prancing crimson
the pronouns get all confused

I'm camping on your sofa
and you in my personal sky

it could be a comedy or pure
otherwise I can't tell apart

the rictus of grief from laughter
because the pain is everlasting

and all we can do is giggle
stupidly in our snug agonies

actors following blindly
with no director a blank script.

12 September 2008

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Or a word is just a blade
between the mind
and its little world

to let light in
from that bigger one
we guess to share.

The object of desire
is desire. Love itself
is remembering something

that seemed to happen
long before, we try
to put my hands on it

now but never will.
It recedes in front of me
deep inside me.

Every word an echo only.

12 September 2008

KING ÆDWIN'S SPARROW

Confronted by Christians
teaching him or trying to,
the King solicited advice
from this thanes and pagans,

his priests they said Consider
the winter, you sit at meat
in the hall with friends and drink
dark outside with storm and ice

from which on a sudden one
sparrow flies in, flaps
dazed around the room
happy in warmth and light

and then is gone – we humans
live like that, nothing known
of our before and after, nothing
known of what's really outside,

maybe these new ideas
will tell us what we need to know.
Or maybe not. Try them
a season and we'll see.

So the king allowed Christians
to come and teach till soon
his people were converted, wet hair
dangling in their blue eyes

and so it went a thousand years
or more. But the King
in his heart knew something else,
that sparrow was not just life

betwixt borning and dying,
that bird was every thought
ever flutters through the mind
of joy or lust or pain

and then is gone, “that bird
is every single thing, and this brain
of mine one blazing hall
full of minstrelsy and grief

outside which there is something
dark and cool and everlasting.
When will some priest teach me
to go with the bird and be gone?”

13 September 2008

OCD

1.

After a while
it goes away
you miss it
then, you turn
the faucet off
only once, you
lock the door
and walk away.

You miss your
madness that made
you you, you
thought, but then
another madness took
you in hand,
love, the other
people loved you

and their insanity
swallowed up all
your own. Everything
tastes different now
because you are
finally the same.

2.

Now if I touch this
I don't have to touch
that. The pity I used
to feel for unused things
hurts less now, things know
how to take care of

themselves, they gave me my
own soul back I lodged
in them, each picket in
the fence had to touch,
skip all the sidewalk cracks.

13 September 2008

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Along the coasts of the image

can I go back and find you later
another day or is the picture
locked in time so that

whenever I look on you I am when you are,
the heavy wool on Atget's women makes me sweat

but today is today
and no image

I think or is thinking so
an image of me as a man with something on his mind
staring into the mirror and seeing nothing
and liking it better than what the mirror sees?

Drown your image in images—
Michael Mayer: *Bring fire to the fire.*

13 September 2008

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there is no CIA

not even the Collective Imagination of America
whereby we project our guilt
into the world as agency
of the evil resident within our doubt.

Foreigners keep out.

Have an army take it far away
to invade a country soldiers never heard of
and kill weird-looking strangers.

We vote to do it year after year
and then the hurricane comes
and we won't let it tell us anything

all the catastrophes are just our karma ripening
(and the red states get the brunt of it,

the blue voted against the war they get hurt less)

13 September 2008

DAY OF THE CROSS

The mystery here
the lifting up of the Holy Cross
to be colloquial

the finding of the holy Residue
rough intact inside
the ordinary animal of our speech

the day the day itself
the definite
article by which we live

it also lives.

The long Lent of the monks begins today
when they take seriously
the word they have said. Heard. Had.
The word they had happen to them.
The word they hold.

That is why they say The
Cross, for there is only one
and each one finds it, climbs it,
is taken down dead from it
and comes to life another time,
the always the never the again.

The thing finds us,
the ultimate instrument,
and when it gets lost, then the queen
comes along and digs it up

she always knows where it is hidden,
lifts it, or has her daughters
friends lovers soldiers lift it
into the local sky,

the Cross the one same thing,
the business nailed to the sun and

every definite word
says this history again.

Dreams told her. Waking
remembered her to do.
Lift me, lift me
it said. Everything she did

did it. She watches them climb.

Nailed to what they mean
they climb the wood of what they want,
matter *madera*
the lumber of light

they told us was the lumber of love.

Then it was evening
and the wood hid itself again in earth
indefinite.

The pain slept.
14 September: Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.
Language begins.

2.

Language begins when we are nailed to what we mean
by what we say. The definite
loves you
better than I can.

I don't want to find the definite,
I want to walk around the edges of it,

stare into the abyss of the singular
darker than any guess could gleam

and wander there by footstep night and weird
waiting for candles to flicker up in passing houses

sometimes stop and have to talk in them
for the sake of something warm

those terrible ones who are not you
while I walk around the rim of the thing

this local absolute bereft and so much for me.

14 September 2008

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Planning to know everything
he actually knows
only the things his hands like touching
minus the things they like letting go.

14 September 2008

KISMET

Finding a fond star.
Today is your horoscope
erected by a skeptic.
Today is finding
the way a child finds
in any place at all
something to do.
That is destiny.

14 September 2008

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something swarming
alarming like the slash
of sword on sword

the birds of Damascus
make such weather
dry rain
 children made of cloud

they hate us
for being
or because our being
appears to them as bigger than their own

whereas whereas
we can hear the slish of swordplay better
the nasty noise of razored air

the wound of music
never leaves their ears.

14 September 2008

THE MATERIAL

Less be said
be *alternate*.

Speak the altar,
language of the other.

God spread out upon the world
hearing us think with His machine

this godly gift called Matter
without which no canzone,
no Alp, no hand
to touch your hand.

2.
No even you.

Since what we are
is *separations*,
trial apartnesses,
boxed off in the *materials of difference*.

To see what happens.

The sea is made of me, you said,
and the wind ruffled your hair.

My theology is complete.

15 September 2008

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When rain comes on Rainday
and on Winday the wind blows
it means the world is running right
and the rose tree sets off a rose.

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what does it mean that people
like us are locked inside each other
is it forever like a scar a shadow
from a sun that won't go down

inside us a tin box from Mexico
stuffed with old rose petals
no color but they still smell
and we never did anything

we don't even have to talk
anymore or phone or write or
not even remember just a presence
inside us the flesh of the mind.

15 September 2008

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Risks, ruins, apartments
in which dying lilies are kept.
How strong the smell. Always
and always. Never lose essence.
Nothing can ever be less than itself
said Aflatun, I think. Or it would be hell
on earth, a palace of diminishing.
Wisdom is a book on a shelf
in a burnt-down mansion long ago.

15 September 2008

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Who can answer the question outside the little room
the moon he tried to mean but she was small
that night who now overwhelmed the meager window
—We are all about looking, he said—
and there would never be any rain. Forgive me, father,
for I grew. I turned into you. My eyes dimmed,
my stratosphere rehearsed some other universe
when one honest home planet would do. I did it to you.
I just wanted to be as good as you used to be
at things you cared enough to be good at but did I care?
He was silent for a few minutes like a cup of wine
with no wind blowing, or a book in a bookstore window
closed for the night where a cat sits watching the moon.

16 September 2008

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All poems end with the moon.
The poem is always saying
Look at this thing close at hand
then it distracts you from it,
Look at that bright thing in the sky

out of arm's reach, inconsolable,
even the nearby will never be near enough,
even what your hand actually holds
you will never really feel.
Hurry from this house into the arms of the moon.

16 September 2008