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Things hurt. And words
have to get said. Enough
fuss. Blow the wind.
Stand the earth. Push
the leaf out. Bud.

27 March 2007

THE GAME

I kept waiting for some information to quiet my eyes
but the checkerboard engraved on the polished granite bench
between two mysterious Chinese characters (all
writing is mysterious to a stone) was empty of chessmen,
the whole affair was wet from snowmelt and spring's
fraudulent caresses, there was no game in this game.

How could we sit down on this matrix, could I put a pebble
on the smooth stone like the old Jew puts on a grave
(every stone is a tombstone), we could leave it behind us
and walk down into the drenched meadow towards the far
trees we never quite get to, down the path to the hidden
stream where it pools out for a moment and already
skunk cabbages are starting to make their move but still

this simple-minded sixty-four compartmented conundrum
hangs in the mind, all numbers are the men and the board,
the pawns and the queen, the silly little blue faience lumps
Egyptians used to while away long years of being dead.

27 March 2007

When I open the Book of my Memory, which is the little book that contains all the others, to find the books that turned me to my work and practice, I discover two kinds of texts: the read and the heard. I am one of the fortunate ones who grew up in a time when you could come to hear the voice of a poet before even reading the text. So the books I must mention here will speak of these two kinds, with equal affection and reverence.

Heard live:

Dylan Thomas, around 1952, reading Yeats' "Lapis Lazuli" and his own "Fern Hill," and other poems.

Paul Blackburn in New York, reading from *The Dissolving Fabric*, 1959

Robert Creeley at the Living Theater in New York, 1960

Louis Zukofsky reading "A" 7 Brooklyn, "A" 15 Annandale, early Sixties.

Edward Dorn, reading "CB&Q", Buffalo, 1964

John Wieners, reading "Poem for Trapped Things," 1964

Basil Bunting, reading from *Briggflats*, Harvard, 1967

Listened to via recordings:

Robert Duncan, 1960, reading on WBAI "Poem beginning with a line by Pindar." Though I heard Duncan live many times, that first hearing was radical for me; I recorded it off the radio, and lived with the recording, till I could ape it aloud.

Ezra Pound, those recordings from *The Cantos* that James Laughlin made on the lawn at Saint Elizabeth's.

William Carlos Williams record of him as an old man, reading from *Asphodel*, and especially the poem "For Eleanor and Bill Monahan."

The texts I met by reading, the (say) earliest most important dozen:

Coleridge's "Kubla Khan"

Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, in the translation by Edna Millay and George Dillon.

Pound's *Kulchur*, and *ABC of Reading*

Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which I read the only time I've ever been in a hospital, I was fourteen, they got me out of bed in the middle of the night and gone from that place.

Apollinaire, the *Selected Writings* in the great New Directions series.

Rilke, *The Duino Elegies*.

Chaucer, the *Tales*, the *Book of the Duchess*, *Troilus*

Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*.

Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Mann's *The Magic Mountain*

Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Shakespeare's *Dream, Winters Tale*

Middleton & Rowley, *The Changeling*

Blake, *The Four Zoas, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

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In revising time
is time revised.
My quotient forward
leaks an hour,
a horn, then an afternoon.
Sleep while doing things.
And not sleep.
Eyes hurt
from my own words.
And even other
books are defiled
by what they share,
my hard attention paid.
In all the books
all their windows
need cleaning.
All I see is glass.

28 March 2007

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All of this energy
puts you to sleep
says the book to the reader
even your hands
holding me are bored.

28 March 2007

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A consternation of castanets
scandalizing le tout Paris
just by being there, somebody.

Some people's presence
is just too big,
even in the ordinaryest

attire astonish.
So would an Idea
(that charlatan)

in the Mind
(that marketplace
of the obvious)

and all the people
gasped and then forgot.
Ethics, the race to the top.

28 March 2007

HERE BEGINNETH THE NEW LIFE

it said (*dixit*,
it or he or she or something said)
and I believed.

To interpret what you hear
as a command (*hören/hörchen*)
is to be mad. Obedient. On the move.

The road says go.
We are a γ +o .b . ‘goers’,
here beginneth the new life.

[pron. *dro-wa*]

A change has happened,
substance alteration not a Gnostic one.
I know the same stuff,

my hand can still find the keys
but the music that comes out
is different,

A Scumbag Sea

it said, *A Violet Wave* it relented,
we trust the strangest things

in trusting things at all.
The plans of thwarted life
from which dream data come.

Hungry, but the plate of food
falls, my fault though not near,
I spoke and thus distracted

the table from its sustaining role.
Look away and everything is gone,
I had to get away too

I pressed up against the line
that divides day from night
pushing, trying to find the way out.
It's not what we talk about

that makes religion
but the talk itself, idle chatter of the gods

we taste in our final mouth.

29 March 2007

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My modest text my sympathy

never got anywhere.
Couldn't hear, couldn't
comprehend.
Where is the whistle
you can hear in wood?

You have run away from me so many times
that at last I learned to flee myself.

29 March 2007

THE LURE

I had given a reading in the West Village, and now was walking up West Street under the highway with a few members of the audience. We stopped at an outdoor café, and had drinks and coffee. There was a tall bluff man from Copenhagen – not the first time a Dane had appeared in this connection. As we sat and talked, a yellowjacket came and stung me on the ball of my left thumb. I plucked the insect out as gently as I could and tossed it on the pale table. Someone went to crush it, but I coaxed it very gently with a spoon until it pulled itself together –the words seemed almost literal—and flew away, apparently all right. But there was a stinger still stuck in my thumb. I pulled it out, no pain yet, though I anticipated it. I licked the puncture steadily. No pain, but the skin around the wound started to granulate oddly, till a patch as big as an old 5 DM coin (that was the example that occurred to me) was lumpy with painless granulations. I kept licking, and gradually the swellings went down.

I went on walking north; now only one person was with me, a lean middle-aged pleasant philosophical type from Amsterdam. We talked about his city while we walked through mine. Presently we turned right, onto a crosstown street. We had come into a neighborhood that only I ever seem to find in New York, where the houses are separated by little gardens, vegetable plots, vacant fields. We walked east, and suddenly I saw a woman leaning against a tree, and talking on a cell phone. It was Lynn Behrendt! How strange to find her here in New York. Her face lit up with delight when she recognized me, a pleasure I shared, though mitigated by a sense of guilt that I had not let her know about the reading. But how could I have known she'd be in New York, apparently living there in a nice house not so different from her Linden Avenue house upstate?

She welcomed me, I introduced my Dutch companion, and we all went inside. Her business partner, an older, white-haired rubicund man, quiet, industrious, was arranging on various plates pastries they had made. They were running a catering business, and from the look of the many sorts of pastries, they must have been very good at it. The plates, though, seemed a little less than worthy of the petits-four and profiteroles that adorned them – one of them reminded me of a saucer I had broken just the day before.

But Lynn was still on the phone, and, it turned out, talking to someone who had been at my reading, and was telling her about it, evidently raving about it.

She handed me the phone, saying it was Liz or Lisa. But the voice on the other end was clearly a man's, and vaguely familiar. He'd been at the reading, liked it, the poems I'd read from *May Day*, and above all the poem called "The Lure." There was no such poem in the book, or in all my work, as far as I could tell, but I didn't want to say that. The voice, which I began to think might be that of Ron Silliman, went on, and we signed off after a little confusion about his exact e-mail address – now many M's in it? I knew that Lynn would know, so I handed the phone back to her to finish her talk.

I didn't taste any of the pastries, but examined them with interest. Though I strangely felt no urge to taste them – perhaps because I knew they were being prepared for a major event. As I was looking at them, a small plate (like the one I had broken at home the day before) seemed to fall by itself off the table and smash, with its three or four petits-four, onto the floor. My fault, I said, though clearly it wasn't. Think nothing of it, the white-haired man said.

Originally, I had planned to stay the night in New York, at some midtown hotel I had not yet chosen. But somehow after the beesting and the nice meeting with Lynn and the odd phonecall and the broken dish, as if all that could happen had happened, I realized it would be better to drive home to Charlotte tonight. So I left without long farewells and walked north again, towards the midtown parking garage where the Forester was waiting.

2.

The Lure.

So the dream is a lure.

How many m's in dream?

Why did the yellowjacket sting,

how many mm's in a bee?

And why when the stinger was left in my hand

could she fly away intact, a blessing?

A dream is a blessing,

pressing against a door or the skin.

licking the wound,

a dream is a wound that waking licks.

3.

But the food falls.

A fault.

It's all my fault,

the dream felt.

I did not touch it,

the table failed

the food fell.

On the floor the glistening

icing on the long rum-soaked cake

rolled over, the way food dies

but we live. My fault

for not touching,

my fault for not eating.

My fault for being there.

Anywhere.

4.

Now I have to write "The Lure"

so he can hear it,

he who has a woman's name

when a woman's hand

hands me the phone but a man's

voice when my man's hands holds it

I held his voice in my hand.

But the other hand the bee had stung,

the woman power of the sting stuck in,

I plucked it out, I restored her,

or none of the above, it was a dream,
the dream lures me to reflect, remember, change,

change my life. I woke up and thought:
Here beginneth the new life

quoting Dante but meaning me, my life,
my new life begins today,

incipit vita nova, but in English,
my life in my own language

5.

And then it was night. Like the famous
pericope in Demosthenes.
We are the conspirators. We lurk
at the midnight hour
hoping to revise the dream.

Against the stream. Sandman,
send me a dream, we sang once.
A dream where it is different.
Where the feel of the body
feels the body. Where the words

finally become flesh. Then it was night.
Around the watchfires of the words
some meanings flickered,
tasted the reality of our desires,
tested us, wanted us, became.

29 March 2007

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Not being alone in a place.
Too many dreams.
Or scraps of dream
chase each other
rats scurrying under floorboards
till I get up
and walk into an empty room

hoping that it is, but what I am
violates emptiness.
On every side a dream.
A stale flat piece of Persian bread.

To do my last miracle
with, and wake.
I know there are voices everywhere in the night
but not here, why can I hear them,
keep hearing them
hissing at me to make me listen?

Pick up the phone and call.
Pick up the phone and cry.

29/30 March 2007

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Hasn't there been enough said about slippers,
squirrels, war? What have we figured out
Homer's lance-head bronzing through a man's face
didn't tell us? The human agent
is the human target. Mercy,
mercy. A flight of birds.

29 / 30 March 2007

THE GLEAM

sought, the gleam
I have followed all my life
erratically, as every else,
mostly inside, mostly outside,
gleam on the flanks of silver
cups or skin, the gleam
that tells being to begin.

30 March 2007

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Weft, could the thought of weaving
prick its rule into the run of light
with no hand work, mere rapture'd stay
and wrap around those chilly shoulders
by which it's known the god's been by.
So much heat the skin knows how to lose
then the winter comes in every night.

30 March 2007

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Brightness because. Or one other
waiting for the car. We called it.
It came. It ran on rails
we couldn't see. The trees passed

solemn as processing priests
each priest was his own crucifix
each leaf its own blood-stained veil.
We have come, and have come too far.

From nearby bars the chatter
of a bright machine, a sport happens,
men dressed like children chase
the shadow of a checkered ball.

Where am I now? Where am I living?
Or where is life when we do it,
and who? A building among buildings.
A street lost in an edgeless maze of streets.

30 March 2007

NO ANSWER

Je rêve d'une chevalerie de la sensibilité à laquelle appartiendraient tous ceux héros qui ont joué généreusement avec leur vie. Tous ceux qui ont été jusqu'au bout d'un rêve, sans billet de retour : les adolescents, les héros, les vaincus, les suicidés. Quel mystérieux lien les unit ! . . . Faute de pouvoir changer le monde, ils ont fait corps avec leurs rêves. Ils ont préféré épargner leurs songes plutôt que leur sang. L'homme qui survit est toujours un adolescent qui s'est trahi. Chaque geste, chaque pensée adultes sont un parjure aux promesses et aux défis de la quinzième année.

— *Ils ont choisi la nuit*, Jean-Marie Rouart

No answer
and no question. They are there
beautiful as and in the way of
animals, you see them at evening
close to the trees, small, graceful,
and you have no names for them

only a huge excitement in you
that you have seen them, they promise you
something about yourself,
a promise you suddenly know how to keep.

31 March 2007

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Facing it the fence between
the living and the something
else between. A block.
The holes in text the brick.
Burning something only
leaves a fiercer memory of.

31 March 2007

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The color of what is there
is a muscle in the air.
Light behaves the way a lover does,
always fussing, always close around the fur,
gleaming where it can. Where it finds
the little sea of receptivity.
Romance. To step outside
on a day like this is to blunder
childlike into a vast intrigue.
The intricate happenstance,
a carnival of things. Leaf me,
leaf me not, the first
snow-blossoms, first crocuses
are ready to flare, at this hour
still just green shoots. But green,
green. And color is all we need.

31 March 2007

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Espoir. Like a glass
a little bit finger-smudged
holding milky yellow.
Pastis. A taste
of time itself.
The mouth
is always trying to be now,
speaks, wet,
what keeps language clean.
Espoir. A handkerchief
held to the left eye
or near it, cambric on the cheek,
rhetoric holding its breath.
Spes romana, a Roman hope.
To have. To connect.
This place with your lap.
Ever. Iter. A road, and going on it,
a journey. Hair in your eyes.
Espoir. The kerchief waves goodbye.

31 March 2007

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It is a kind of disease.
Being beautiful.
So that the person
with you always
wants more. Not more
than there is, just
more than you can
give. That's what's so sad,
your wants are different
sizes, nothing holds.
Kabbalah needs perfect
fit. Beauty alas has
no reciprocal at all.

31 March 2007