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NAMES

Names
name only themselves
but you
name everybody.

12 February 2005
Boston

=====
Dark hallway
darker narrow stairs
built out of wood
into the wood

after the first turn
a half step
after the next
some light below

dim one comes
down through the fact
of things
a vague way

of saying this
this (stumbles
touches wood
the wall guides)

this.

12 February 2005, Boston

=====

There are no happy endings.
Endings are always sad.

From now on
every poem should
'end' with a comma,

12 II 05, Boston

=====
Back in my whistling days
(people used to
on sidewalks and subways and stoops
people used to
just like cigarettes and Yello-bol pipes)
I let the tune carry me
from Crescent Street to Elderts Lane

some fish to bring home
or some crab fry or just keep going
over the unmarked frontier into Queensborough
they spelled it where the little library was
on the north fork of the corner
where the Bank of the Manhattan Company sat
offering the lowest interest rates in town.

But the books were there, for two weeks
or four were mine, depending,
everything is depending, a library
is a doctrine of dependence

and I could carry eight of them sometimes
whistling all the way home
never looking at a book along the way
save the good thing for the time alone
a book is a kiss in the dark

but obviously you need a city to whistle in
and what does a city do
when all the whistlers are gone?
Nestled in their iPods closed
men jog along the silent streets.

12 February 2005

=====

Look – is this what I was trying to say
all this while, on a warm night in winter
skunks think about spring? Is it love
that makes the porch smell so bad
where they have been? Who really is
the Lord of Resemblance? Who
is the Queen of Despair? We wait
for traffic then we slip in and join it
and we are traffic too, mile after mile,
while the skunk tends to his busy earth.
How long will things keep waiting for us?

12 February 2005

NINE ROADS

1.

Good road,
carry my fro
back to me,

the coffee's brewing
the camel sleeps in the garage

the mute hibiscus
smothers the patio

there is no winter.

2.

Tree road, the signal capture
is always listening, you have
a letter or two waiting
carved in my bark too
the name of her who went,

this is the plausible country
the walls are made of streets
and the streets are paved with go.

3.

Wine road, it is not I who drink you
or spill what's left of the glass
into the distance,

I stay,

I am like a mast on a swift ship
immovable, man of the ship,
ethics, diamond merchant, sneak.

But I stay. Pour
back to me again the light she took.

4.

Telephone road just listen,
city rats and country mice and all the wise
crystals that fools take in
singing their lungs out into you,

light up and bring me new,
tell me to meet some queen
under the oak half past midnight
then I'll hang up and let you sleep.

5.

Opinion road this is all about your attitude,
pants worn low, tummy showing,

philosophy, Umbria, where will you go
this summer and will you find her there,

your other half, lady of predication, lost
mistress of freemasonic microeconomics,

pant with lust, dress her in newspapers
soak her in sunlight and read her clean.

6.

Doubting road, do I know who I mean
or who was president when she set out
or how many candles? I want the daylight
before *Genesis*, the flame before Menorah,

go away and leave cathedrals in your wake
all white again waiting for a miracle of touch.

No chance in chance itself, no space in time—
the waif I want was old before the moon.

7.

Coffee road you bring me to her,
distance is just a drug like any other,
dry the distance out of her and cure me too,

the rosary beads lead round to other beads
and Mary comes home to find her child again
a daughter this time in a mawkish nightie
and no one dies, could this be the dream?

In all my life I never rode the camel.

8.

Wrist road, you made me do it.
All the work. Walk. Shirk. Strive. Shrive.
Swink and swive. Wrist road, you twist
the meanings of the simplest things into words and store the words.

It is I guess an elegant mechanism,
but bring her back to me, the one with feet and hands and mouth,
the one who is all science and no fact,
or do I mean the other thing, the night?

9.

Night road you are the one that works,
walk and no streets, touch and no skin,
hands with no clothes to hide them in,
moon and no sky, the no-wheel bicycle
hurries towards no goal. The Lord hath set me up
for his target-practice. I read that in Job's book,
I closed the book and the door sprang open,
the one who meant me suddenly was there.

13 February 2005

THE WONDER

is what it is,
your face across the room
so many people
and only one you

and only you.
The way you looked today,
the serenity, the strange
excitement of your quietness

when I was quiet too
with looking, as if after
all these years could still
not get enough of seeing

you, the answer
to everything, the mood
of the actual inscribed
in how you seem.

I love looking at you
the way I love the sea
or watching mountains
outlast sunsets

and still be there.
It is a matter of identity
that shows. An always
in the smallest room.

14 February 2005
Valentine's Day, for my beloved Charlotte.

a woman's voice reciting her poem in my dream:

“Remain a footnote
in your country's historia,
footnote 314”

13/14 II 05

A HOUSE OF REEDS

1.

A house of reeds
to stand against the wind
to be a boat on a hillside
and make the land move past you

océan de terre, Apollinaire's
gateway to language,

our time talk, when we *feel* the things around us,
the things on which we stand

and to feel them they must also be alive,
they are alive,

reciprocal existence of all things
and not one all alone,

if you can see it, it must have life.

The ocean is all sistering,
the boat a lost idea.

2.

There are no topics there are only places,
topoi. "A course organized around a topic
is intellectually irresponsible. Has no core
but an opinion. We give up liberty
to talk about 'liberty'." Topos, a place.

And all that happens there. The whole
of what happens in a place is the place.
Even the animals. Even the priests.

3.

I never said anything like this before.

It is snowing. It is not a fact yet
but not an opinion either. It is a convention
that freezes your nose. Your tongue
tries to catch one as it goes.

Gone. It is a snow. The meaning
always changes if you start to notice it.

4.

N Dwat Egyptians called the place
where dead men go, one by one always,
across the river of the west, or to the west

where the gaunt reprisals called Architecture
wait for you. Hell is an empty building
you have to fill, you have forever
since its endless corridors go nowhere.

What is heaven? Hard to say.

A boat goes there, you look up
some nights and see it swooning past overhead.

5.

But inside the hour
the minutes are sticks:
dried reed
plastered with the mud
of our attention.
The mud of mind.

Adam means wet clay.
Red alertness in a green shadow
o who can listen to Adam's voice
now sounding like a clock,
a tower on fire, a bell
falling out of the sky.

And Eve? Dear Eve
is nothing but the alphabet.
Torn from the cage
where he kept his breath.

Built from his bones. She
is the organs of articulation.
She is the memory of meat.
Tongue and palate, throat
and breath. The bell
has rung now
and the earth keeps waking.

6.

Reed. Need.

The tyrant from Tikrit
tore up the reeds

dammed the water courses
dried the mud.
Changed the water

language there.
Who can bring
the sound of water

back from the shadow
of a lost word?
Music was the first to go.

Then some men came
who knew the law of God
so needed God no more.

Told us that freedom
meant doing what they said
or we'd be dead.

7.

So any house is made of reeds,
tsa, grass or any little rooted thing
lasts longest in the mind.

The root of mind is hard to find.
Have questions instead of sons.
Twist reeds together

till you make a little godalmighty
then keep him in your pocket
and worship him with raisins.

Death, disguised as the Rapture,
runs silently through the prairies
looking for me. I hide myself

among the maidens. I hide among sheep.

8.

Everybody is always waiting.

The reed
exposes its hole to the wind,
the wind says something sly in there

and we hear music. Music
is people having sex in other rooms.
Music is a house built just out of wind

9.

I gave her diamonds
she gave me gold
we wrote in old letters
borrowed from cartularies
of the time of Charlemagne,
the king of noon.

Literacy has its limits.
Just before I died
I learned to read the sky.

14 February 2005

=====

But the star moved
and the tree stood

as you would expect
it to, and all the other

stars stayed still.
This one was mine

and it was moving.
The snow fell

intricate with branches,
shadows. Nothing

moved but it
and the star. My star.

[25 January 2005]
[18 February 2005]