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## UMBRELLA

The wind lifts the green  
umbrella off the patio  
holds it just over my head  
my hand can on the second  
try reach the stem and coax it down  
fold it till calm weather.  
A feeling in its moment

only. But bring the feeling to  
evident origin

as if your fingers were your toes  
and walked in heaven

the distortion of being  
somebody  
on the road  
a long line looped around the heart

pull tight, the Russian  
anger of loving you  
a little wind  
looking into those clear eyes  
how can they hate me so much

another movie  
matinee the opposite of morning  
wake this life of mine

I began when I came out of the theater  
onto Fulton Street one hot afternoon  
but unknown to me the exit itself  
and the street and the lazy summer people  
were all part of the movie, and this  
is still the movie and

a work of art once begun is never ended.

They all go on. They all go on  
forever,

the projector seldom falters, the light  
is true  
ever after

as you turn into you  
ceaselessly and the role of I am  
constantly recast  
a shimmer of happenstance  
while the plot idles in the background  
a car goes somewhere with people in it  
a woman takes off her dress and cries

I see the ocean every now and then  
between the heads of those I love  
remind me I never left home  
and all the while I thought I was reading a book  
then writing one  
but it was just the movie  
anonymous as rain

once you're in it you're in it  
the carpeted staircase the candy stand the tile in the bathroom  
the girls laughing by the water fountain  
the exit door that smashes open full of light  
the street the train the house the sky  
the mother the father the wife the little cat  
all part of the same admission the same  
incoherent masterpiece of love.

5 July 2002

## NAMES LEFT OVER FROM THE OPERATION

But if I calculate the transformations  
with the evidence submitted, lipid shimmer,  
bake a cookie, or will a flag  
drape over a cloud (a cloud could)  
and the sun itself be some gaudy patriot?  
Who is Elemer, who is Hopson,  
who is Father Measles, who is Loeb?  
Name your opera, pardner, we've got  
to pour the last music into the desert  
eager as a dumb dog, nothing  
waits forever. Bach no more  
my pretty little one, my brass  
coal scuttle my half-Brit valentine.  
Amazed shopkeepers chop water  
with their practiced fingertips. Endure  
like sun on grass, that's all.  
An hour more to soak the bonsai  
and give pleasure to the alien inspectors  
who hover in their Oldsmobiles aloft  
---- they pay us to survive ---- tell me,  
my sheikh, how long is your experiment?  
Aren't we battered enough by being?  
Does there have to be barter too, my words  
for your music, all that slick exchanging?  
I just wanted to be fire in your water,  
I just wanted to be the spell I cast on you  
so that I can finally enjoy myself. Read

the menu. Follow the maitre d' down  
through the pimlico of bolting diners  
into the serene entitlement of soup.  
You pay for crap like this. All right, I'll pay,  
my heart for that hip, sleek thief,  
imponderable animal are you? Home yet?  
Is the river dry? The sun knows how to rain  
but could the skin receive (cloud could)  
damp messages from earlier operas?  
*Iris, L'Oracolo, Peter Ibbetson.* Cloud?  
Even home is too far from home.  
Waring Blender. Electro-Lux. Arcadia.  
When I was on the verge of puberty  
someone I was was on the verge of dying  
now I have inherited his books his ways  
his fluent explanations. They ring the churchbell  
each time a bachelor tells a lie,  
count the hours then you'll know  
how far the truth still has to go  
to answer each tree leaf individually  
like the pope distributing communion  
the whole forest stirs around the simple hand.  
House. Live in my hands. When complex  
individuals bake cookies and the sky  
is a kind of silent blue, the clouds are anxious  
and edgy philosophers discuss identity.  
This means the movie turns and talks about the eye.  
This means you, unspeakably myself  
I caress your momentary absences all over.

5 July 2002

## NAUTICAL LANGUAGE

Not to desire her aloft  
the strangely pilgrim  
smack on the broad sea  
by the shape you know her

count the parts the stems the veils  
what kind of ship  
sails up a word

pilgrim port or man of war  
device on the mainsail  
arrogantly unknown.

For you she dared the portolan's  
inscrutable roses, the unlogged  
certainties of reef and cliff  
like a priest offering an animal

something like blood drips down the hull.

Q. How does a ship sail?

A. By the puff or suck of its own breath.

When you touch yourself you're at the middle,  
it ploughs the sea of its own blood  
and then the ship comes in  
gulls shattering the sky above it

acts of contrition and the land quakes  
a ship shaped like a sigh  
falls from the high wave  
down into your littlest harbor  
a little bit after the middle of the day.  
A holiday. The volcano  
smokes prettily up beyond the glacier  
and parliament adjourns with a prayer.

6 July 2002



## A TREATISE ON FREE WILL

Understood nothing of what I've seen  
don't know how music comes  
all my life they've milked from the air  
green felt black rubber sleek CD

my religion is to be a microphone  
love is a violation exclusively insertions  
transgressions of a fugue the know-how  
happens in your after head

music comes of what I've seen the dumb  
felt details the green ink of the visible  
to understand nothing how the tape felt  
stretched around the tone the brave band  
lost in the wilderness of listening

but still in seedy Roma the Holy  
Spirit manages to keep, sleep, wake  
inside another love inserted  
a puff of white smoke over every chapel  
transgress me for I am orifice alone  
or On this tone I build my choice  
the fakes of will shall not prevail against it  
when all we are is choosing, the web  
of circumstance stretched across a fact or two  
    the stuff you measure and call  
    by one word or another when all  
    it means is one more feeling.

7 July 2002

## LEARNING

Teacher, show me the stylus the cursor  
the straightedge the abscissa the eraser.  
Cut a mask of my face out of oak tag,  
teacher, let me wear it instead of my face.

8 July 2002

## THE ACT OF

Feeling the shape  
flow down my fingers  
into this thing  
I do not know, can't  
know till it says itself  
under my hands,

how can such things be?  
That the answer  
lives in the one who  
barely can speak  
the question out  
into the air

like some furtive friend  
steals into my house  
and picks up a guitar  
then feels guilty  
at touching  
what is not hers  
to touch and softly  
sets it down  
and even so  
a sound invades  
the air,  
    a hollow  
left inside hearing,  
sweet scar of  
something felt.

8 July 2002

## WHILE

while the assassins are busy at our bus stops  
while the honey trickles through the bear's muzzle fur  
while the organist runs a finger round his collar  
while the stone sits in the sun and no one waits  
while the weekend guests wake up back in the city  
while the cloud slips past the white pines  
while two blue jays complain by the empty feeder  
while the governor is gazing from safety at a forest fire  
while the bookbinder thinks about learning to read  
while a gutter in Jericho drips radiator coolant and cola  
while pre-teens contemplate unendurable pangs of desire  
while no one lives inside the clothes in the closet  
the afternoon is quietly saying good bye to you forever.

8 July 2002

## CONFESSION

I've never read the Rilke letters to a young poet. I think many years ago I started to read it, and then thought something like this: I want to be able to say these things, not receive such instructions. It was the arrogance of my young manhood, that wanted to stand in the place of the poet speaking, not the young poet. And so I think I have missed much wisdom and tenderness. That is the shame and sadness of it. But I took a stance, to be the one who spoke. And that has been a blessing and a way.

8 July 2002

## THE ADOLESCENT

You asked me did I want to see your breasts  
then you took me where there were fireflies  
thousands of them more than I had ever seen  
more than there are in the world  
you took me outside the world  
into a valley where a naked woman  
was almost naked and you were she  
and you were the only solid in the world  
and I saw your eyes where fireflies  
lit up the night they actually gave light  
I saw the straw light of the standing corn  
I saw the dark rims of your areolas  
and for all these years my lips have tried  
to shape the word that meant your breasts.

9 July 2002

## THE QUIZ

The candidate sits at a table, hands palm down, comfortably apart on the table top. The questioner stands facing the candidate. Between them, at right angles to both, stands a large clock with a stopwatch feature.

The questions are asked in the same format: “Are you x or y?” The candidate is told to answer instantaneously, without thinking, fast as he can. The stopwatch times the answer, and the elapsed time is noted by the questioner. The slow answers will, of course, be the object of later review.

The questioner asks the questions quickly, clearly, each following as fast as possible on the heels of the last answer.

Are you:

beautiful or ugly

fat or thin

tall or short

happy or sad

rich or poor

effective or ineffective

active or passive

honest or dishonest

long or short

bright or dull

smart or dumb

learned or ignorant

helpful or unhelpful

lazy or industrious

hot or cold

sexy or unsexy

fast or slow

hot or cold

north or south

blue or green

red or yellow

nice or mean

brave or cowardly

flesh or bone

meat or fat

animal or vegetable

water or fire

sky or earth

sea or shore

light or dark

waking or sleeping

friendly or unfriendly

out or in

back or front

...

(note composed 9 July 2002)



If this were the shape of what it was going to be  
And the shape changed, then the going  
Was going to become a different becoming  
Or coming to be in the place where the shape was made  
Discovering there was nothing but coming  
And after that no shape except becoming  
And no making at all not even anything not even  
The shadow of a shape but only a shaping  
Shaping someone who perceives a shape  
Only a person in short who shadows a becoming  
By coming through the change and being.

9 July 2002



## DON'T HOLD ME TO IT JUST HOLD ME

I haven't heard the subway in ages  
so it's time to walk downstairs again  
and see where all these tunnels  
have in mind,

                    a tunnel is all going  
and no choosing, all the choice  
is done, the train makes noise  
it's full of people reading books, swaying  
attractively and clutching to sleek poles,  
a dance in gravity, language is spoken  
but not by me,

                    my destination  
(suddenly I have one) is incomprehensible  
one stop is just like any other  
walls floors columns benches stairs  
stenches it is like summer  
it is like going to the beach it's raining  
when you climb up out of the station  
how dare the ocean be so wet,

                                    weather  
is an intolerable generalization  
I'll keep all the promises I made I will I will  
but don't look too closely at the keep  
I was born in this city what more do you want?  
A man making a promise is like  
frying a fish that still in the ocean  
or spreading the shadow of a bird  
between two pieces of soft white bread  
and calling it the day after tomorrow.

9 July 2002

## **DENIER**

I scrape the brick dust off the brick  
and send it to the chemist  
Can you prove the shadow of a hawk  
once fell across this wall?  
If not, there are no birds, no cloud, no light.  
And I have refuted the sky.

9 July 2002

## IN THE CARDS

Men hammering, they know how  
morning everybody hurries, inscribe my scroll  
ROTA the girl says she's from the typist pool  
she comes to run my head through her machine  
to see what I will say ROTA when she breaks me  
on her wheel ROTA the sequences of angel assistants  
how she comes to help according to her place  
in the dance her order in the structure TORA  
she comes at the right moment in the sequence  
the right moment is the TORA the sequence is TARO  
we kneel down close together ORAT she prays with me  
Almighty Causality, make this man up ORAT  
she prays Wake him to see how days  
follow his fingers and night is made of eyes  
Teach him to count his cards TARO as they fall  
and understand the empty pattern TORA they tell.  
The girl from the rota is praying up my sleeve  
our bodies are somehow stuck together  
her fingers press the necessary keys the message spills,  
she is more a part TORA of me than I am of myself.  
Men hammering is this girl typing ORAT my words  
pour out of her body, without her TARO  
I would have nothing to tell TORA but with her TORA  
everything, watching my mind unpack itself  
in her lips like milk TARO like the cards spilled on the floor  
telling all of my futures TORA telling me listen  
while she prays ORAT in me, she prays to me  
I pray to her, all it takes is TORA is one sky  
the clouds ratcheting smoothly up through the machine.

10 July 2002