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## RENAISSANCE

But these poems to write now, this news  
this morning, these also  
are fragments of Renaissance  
old broken treatises  
scratched on slate and vellum, scraps  
around the corner from the Mirandolas

I am a fragment of that time  
a coarse new-lettered Hellenist on fire  
with who knows what green flame  
lit from God knows where

because fire is what leaps up *always*  
out from and against the torpor of the usual  
the stalled academy of the secure

2

or this text in water

a salmon to leap, strife  
against the current of this easy time  
this timid mindset built of yesterday

my broken word  
will save the world  
because it is impossible  
to understand

3

we have to burn the horizon

aporia, Arabia,

I stood once on the Persian Gulf  
watching the refineries of the emirates  
burn smoke into dawn

tender blushing smog  
death cult of our prosperous machine

something must be done  
and all I give you are fragments

scraps from lost manuscripts  
miraculously reborn

cloth from her lost loom  
this pen nib licked by Pico's tongue

because the work we make  
now is always past, part  
of the lost body of the lord,  
Osiris, beloved, husband,  
wife, all the lost  
Persephones below, each  
word a clue to find her

to remember her to life

4

because Eros is all and Eros tells  
and all that Eros ever does

speaks out from a dust of scribbled responses  
a whole new word that hurts to hear

5

hurts you because you are the intended  
the promised one

for you the smoke on the horizon  
the dawn flush rose rush  
here, I give it to you

6

but I mean it  
this new thing

any this

this thing that speaks  
from living time

magical formula  
anything that speaks

is a branch

broken off heaven

a psalm of desire cum commento

where the scholiast rests his fingers

lightly at the base of your spine.

16 November 2002

## BEYOND

But is even that far enough to bring it  
the rain back to the sky  
sitting upside down above me  
her hair stampedes my eyes

and the doctor never comes back to the clinic  
he wants to cure a different kind of sickness  
one nobody has, a malady  
beyond the mind, but he feels it

horizons are the hectic flush of it  
so he's gone with the antelope over the prairie  
seeking another chemistry  
leaving us with the rain my clumsy lover

all everywhere at once and the blue  
parrots are still there, one of them  
riots through my memory of fact  
where names of foreign cities and the Popes are stored

until I don't know who I love anymore  
and who the Queen of Hesperus is now  
or where I left the screwdriver last night  
when I went out to fix something crying in the dark.

17 November 2002

## THE INSPECTION

Because when I'm worried  
it's always the police  
beginning again with rain and a volcano  
and men with flashlights move through my garden  
investigating the latest failures of my care

so many forgotten perennials  
a little thoughtfulness would have saved  
but it's all trembling and hiding with me now  
and the men shake their heads  
and look at me with irritated compassion  
knowing full well I don't belong on this earth

but it's not up to them to remove me  
they just switch off their torches and leave  
and I'm suddenly full of fury at all this judging  
going on, my own and other people's  
why don't other people leave other people alone  
to live out their fantasies and be happy as they can

who needs to know where I went wrong?  
it's all wrong, it's all cabbages rotting in frost  
it's all a dead azalea will never come crimson again  
while I lie between sleep and waking  
remembering how I had bitten you once  
just hard enough for us both to regret it  
how strange it is in the midst of all this inadequacy  
we still can actually feel one another.

17 November 2002

## **BELIEVING**

caught in beliefs about rituals  
rituals about beliefs ideas  
about the real

the wooden  
shoe falls off the foot  
it's slippery down in there  
the organic dark  
our forms declare  
out there in matter,

a sound does it  
scares you out of your socks  
a sound you think  
you heard before, you,  
you smoke too much  
your visions are all of you  
in power, suddenly great  
like one of those paper  
Japanese flowers  
that swells up to a proper rose like  
glory when you drop it in the toilet

o I am amazing also, travesty  
of what I set out to be and do  
we have to be  
the thing we loved  
and the poor children who collected  
stamps grow up cancelled, neat  
in the prison house of description

listen to me, I have a telephone  
I have good shoes, first theme  
always comes back, you see it  
as shapes in the fire  
when you visit someone with a fireplace  
and you stare all night  
but she has seen it all before  
remember,

I have a samovar  
but no friends, a house full of shadows  
you and me together, that's the ticket  
but they never said to what show  
or what government we'd be elected  
just the raw ticket in my hand  
with a simple number on it  
nothing fancy, no cube roots or prime,  
just enough to tell you from another  
when there are so many others

it tells me I'm not thinking clearly  
it tells me you smoke too much  
these days out of control  
green government in numbered shadows  
build my house of sticks  
stick it in, you need the information  
I want to sit near you and stare at skin  
and what kind of Imax is that  
the sky broken over me I drown in light.

18 November 2002

## LATE NIGHT, GREEK RESTAURANT, POUGHKEEPSIE

When this music was young  
nobody was born

there was a star over the stable  
but nobody in it

no child, no mom, no wandering Persians.  
Even the ox and ass were absent

treading their mysterious occasions  
over Jude's hill, how far

we have come,  
the militias of common sense

tramping through the night  
burning hayricks and hideaways

where romance shivers  
tries to sustain some delicate illusions

still in your arms or asleep  
on your shoulder.

When this music was young  
the earth was newly laid

bluestone and mica schist and shale  
and so simple we were then

stealing and lying and hitting each other  
happy children before time began,

that endless sin.

18 November 2002

## ATTITUDES

Evidence. Not a word.  
Spindrift, what is that.  
Hate poetic words.  
Money blood desire  
war. And alchemy  
that lost lewd high school teacher  
got so many boys in trouble  
before he had to disappear,  
vamoose, be occulted.  
Where is alchemy now  
Nebraska, Winnetka,  
breeding parakeets  
he teaches to repeat  
the litany of matter  
what little bits of stuff  
we're made of, rounded,  
taught us to sweeten  
our coffee and touch ourselves  
as if the universe were only  
a psychological problem  
and I still think it is.

19 November 2002

*for Franck André Jamme*

**IFEV  
ERYT  
HING  
KNEW  
MEIC  
OULD  
LIST  
ENLE  
SSAN  
DDAN  
CEMO  
REWI  
THMY  
OWNF  
OOTS  
TEPS**

19 November 2002

## BASIC ENGLISH

Alternative

to reading

nothing

reading nothing

sparrow hawk?

only use

words your mother knew

sumac oatmeal kidney dear

but most of all the names of flowers

flowers that she knew

I'll never know

such names.

Brooklyn 1939. A word on paper comes my way. I was reading books at four but do I even now understand what words mean? My eyes move and something happens in my head. I see a nobleman in prison eating hashish paste. A little light slants in the rock window. I see a young Princetonian swim the Hellespont. Is this what reading's for, Helen at the gate looking down on men already dead and don't know it, the old Trojans behind her whispering like mice as they adore her unconscious haunches? Is that all there is in words, the haunches of a woman, the shadow of a cloud?

19 November 2002

## READING

It just now, sixty years later, occurs to me how strange it is that no one took an interest in me in those days. People do get interested in bright children. What a strange curse, that no one did. How I might have blossomed. I might have spoken languages instead of just reading them. I might have made music instead of just listening. What a strange blessing, too, that no one did. How I might have been warped or stifled by advice. I might have learned to read systematically, and spent my life reading without writing. I might have found the teachings of state and church duly transmitted to me satisfying enough to keep me thinly nourished with no further enterprise on my part but smartly listening. I don't know. One way or another it's strange. At five I presented myself at the public library, upstairs, on Nostrand Avenue, smallest branch library I ever saw in New York. I wanted to take out books. The librarians were surprised and suspicious. No sense of wonder at a bright or hungry child. Just doubt. Can he and should he. No respect for what he wanted, which could be, couldn't it, what he needs? Doesn't desire often, not always, reveal need? Anyhow, they didn't. They let me take out a few children's books, to my disappointment, I wasn't a child, I was a reader. In a few weeks they let me take out whatever I wanted. In front of the grocery I found a nice pale wooden orange crate, a two—sectioned affair which, stood on end, became a bookcase in my bedroom when I struggled it home and up the stairs. I was young enough for that little box to take a big effort. My body still remembers the struggle of it up the narrow stairs. My mother was upset at the effort, puzzled at the bookcase. But no one, not parent, teacher, nun or priest thought to guide or counsel or show any interest at all in this otherwise healthy sturdy child that loved to read. It seems so strange now, when we knock ourselves out to signal and reward the slightest signs of talent in a child. Evidently the angels saw to it that I was left strictly on my own. Maybe till there were teachers ready for me, or I was ready to take them with a grain of salt. No wonder I was stubborn and headstrong and arrogant when I finally found myself, in college at 15, among other people who actually read books out of the earnest grail quest for those clues that run from book to book to book almost forever, the old pleasure, the new world found.

19 November 2002

## THE FEW THINGS WE CAN BE SURE OF

and the list stops there  
a null set, can't think  
of a single thing

change, yes,  
change, whatever it is  
will definitely change  
but we can't be sure  
of when or how or how much  
or who will hurt  
and who will benefit

what the trees will look like then  
to whom, in another season,  
another moon.

20 November 2002

## PAGING JUDITH GOLDSTEIN

I lost a girl last night.  
Her name is Judith Goldstein,  
early twenties, slim, spectacles.  
We were having tea in the museum  
and she didn't feel very well  
I offered to drive her home  
and she was happy to accept.  
My black car was parked  
expensively on 54<sup>th</sup> street  
and we were on our way  
by way of a bookshop in the basement  
where I lost her,  
people always get lost  
among the books.  
I wandered around a long time  
anxiously looking for her  
worried because she felt sick  
and might by now be sicker.  
But I didn't know her well  
in fact I don't know why  
we were together, only by now  
we weren't, she was lost  
and I was looking  
through shop after shop  
of endless dream—mazes  
underground bazaars.  
I never found her though I found  
other people I know and other  
women who looked like her

but when I approached them  
they would suddenly have  
children or the wrong hair.  
By now a lot of us were worried  
about her and kept looking  
but only I knew her name  
and finally said it, maybe  
we should try to page her  
there must be a system somewhere  
somebody said, something  
that asks other people  
where they are so other people  
can find them and help them  
and go home together or apart,  
where are they? Where was she?  
Looking for people is so dyslexic  
and I don't even know how it came  
to pass that not an hour before  
we were having a quiet boring  
tête-à-tête lifelessly upstairs  
before all of this happened.  
Or I thought it happened.

21 November 2002

## GALEOTTO

Not to let things float too long.

There is a measure  
out there in the bay

always a bay where I live  
that borderlands my experience  
crazy with marsh grass, with weed

but where I first knew water was no rock.  
That's important, the water  
was stronger than the land, everything  
was unsteady, to stand  
depends on the democracy of mud  
spreading weight over such ground as there is  
like slow skating, very slow.  
Eventually all things sink into the sea  
and the sea wouldn't change,  
just come more, always  
with the same expression on her face.

I'm telling the truth, it's too early to lie.  
I spoke a different language then  
that the body slowly loses, a limber  
willingness to feel, feel anything at all,

to know at last the other side of skin.  
What skin is meant to keep us from.  
The lie of language

comes later, a book someone gives you  
you're afraid to open  
but finally all the bright pictures seduce you  
and you read

then that second language, Language, rises in you  
and takes over your game board and your fingerprints

because language always knows better than you  
language has always been there before you.

Sometimes it's exciting to come to a place  
where language has been a long time before  
and keeps telling you about,

exciting

to catch up with a word  
and find suddenly it's not in your mouth,  
it's out there all round you, snow  
or even in your hand, amber

and know that this is what language  
has been pointing to all along,  
strange to think that the word  
confers special privilege on its thing itself  
by naming it previous to your embrace

when we finally find it  
yet it's not just a sleek warm  
lump of light in the palm of your hand  
it's Baltic Amber, thousands of years.

All language is seduction  
a go-between, a sly  
intrusion on our original feelings

at the behest of and for  
the benefit of the Other  
who is always waiting

waiting for me  
to open my mouth  
and answer her

then I'm trapped  
in the saying

an answer is no better than a question,  
the seduction  
abstracts me from myself  
into her web

and I lost my original language  
the way a wounded bird loses the sky.

21 November 2002

*HOMMAGE A JAMME*

OUGHT  
NEEDS  
NOCOW  
ITMIL  
KSITS  
ELFDR  
Y

WHERE  
AREHA  
VINGB  
EENSO  
MEWHE  
REWEN  
O W

ORARE  
WOMEN  
THEMS  
ELVES  
THEPR  
AYERS  
WESAY

RENEW  
MASKS  
ASSIG  
NOLDN  
AMEST  
ILLSO  
MEBOD  
YCOME  
SHOME

21 November 2002

## **GRAIL**

something that asks  
silver polish  
pink gritty smooth anointing  
a cup somebody  
must have drunk from  
why else was it made  
and who?  
Wouldn't you?

21 November 2002

## GOING TO THE BATHROOM

A sleight of body:  
focus  
on the journey not the goal.

As if we all  
knew why (how)  
anybody goes.

We're not angels  
but we do come back.

21 November 2002

## **LA DANSE**

Graces illuminate musculature  
I have never seen Elena dance  
but I know something from the way  
she frowns. The rest of her  
somewhere else must be smiling.

21 November 2002