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## PERMISSIONS

Can it be what I wasn't thinking,  
the fur of the monkey crouching  
in the Shiva shrine  
along the road up from Pathankot  
into the high meadows  
where the purple trees  
Californians would call jacaranda  
bloomed in all that heat  
under the snow peaks so close  
on the handheld horizon,

not so small, but crouching small,  
same color as the stone, same stone  
Tilopa crushed sesame seeds on  
inside, at right angles to  
the little silver snake, the little  
polished lingam made  
from what looks like meteorite,

God's phallus fallen from heaven,  
now let me think  
about that fur, how hot it must be  
in there, the monkey moveless  
in the siesta heat, the parasites,  
the dandruff, the rights of man  
suspended for the whole  
afternoon of his life,

how far they are, how far  
we have fallen  
down from those mountains  
we see so clear  
as if they were the strange  
white fruit these blue acacias grow.

23 June 2003

Cuttyhunk

How much of the sea is evidence?

Drake, Coronado, Alvarado,  
Vasco, Xavier, Slocum, who  
can find their furrows in the waves,

look at water and stop remembering,

that would be an art,  
a celebration of a comedy  
written by everyone,  
the play that no one's ever seen  
and everyone has been.

23 June 2003

The flagpole, the yacht club burgee,  
the sun after days of rain,  
you know people are happy and for once  
you don't want to take their joy away.  
Even a devil gets a day off,  
and we are devils who have opinions,  
attitudes, feelings, hell is having feelings.  
No, hell is believing what you feel.

Con or trick, red satin  
lapels to your cloak,  
scarlet lining, the mercy  
of color eases a hard world,

for lo! I was bathed in color and  
then the man's arms started to wave  
and the princess demanded her dinner,  
the spring freshets gushed down the fell  
and they slept early on the moors  
dreaming of skeletons  
who spoke to them gently in French,  
soft wet words in such dry mouths.

23 June 2003

## **MELISANDE**

But what did I dream,  
a blue woman, a French poet  
who hated me and scorned me  
and why I could not tell,  
I assured her Mary Garden  
sang the first Mélisande  
in 1902, she said no, she didn't,  
she wasn't the first, and looked at me  
balefully as if it mattered,  
and it mattered, to me, not Mary,  
but this angry, why, French poet

why did she hate me so?  
A man who asks Why about his dreams  
will probably believe anything you tell him,  
so tell me, Or do you hate me too?

23 June 2003

## **DAWN OVER THE VINEYARD**

Spill from that first hour  
sound glad in rain

23 VI 03

Things we are close to  
cool wind out of the hot sun glare  
remembers someone's name  
turns from the window  
to face the dark room.

24 June 2003

Cuttyhunk



## SEMAPHORES

I keep wanting to say that word,  
semaphores, over and over  
and I don't know why, don't know  
which faces of its meanings  
face me now,

                    sign-bearers, is it, or a trim  
young sailor in white  
waving his arms orderly, his flags  
dipping alphabets on a distant ship,

a telling body  
outlined against the light

or is it the sound,  
semaphores and nenuphars,  
the sound of flowers  
easing in the sea wind,

an old smell  
from a fragrant century,  
breathless, the smell of words

everything we do  
is a sign to someone  
if they can read it

a sign begins when it gets read,  
walk through the long streets  
making signs to me  
with all your body  
I learn to read

languages  
easy, book  
are easy,  
it's reading that is hard.  
reading in the streets  
the woods the dark café

words on the page  
are just practice marks

signs of signs, the real signs  
are elsewhere and other, ever,

stars, shepherds, babies, sheep,  
the wind shifts, a wave lifts,

listen.

24 June 2003

Cuttyhunk

## **CHIAN BUSINESS**

in all this hot glare off the sea  
a cold wind plays around my knees

get dressed already  
this planet is not perfect

is perfect.

24 June 2003

## **GNOSTALGIA**

the Island where I knew  
she is waiting  
to wipe the salt off my knees  
with her intelligent linens

the Island where I came  
is on the other side of knowing  
the pain of waiting  
is like the pain of being there

when you know you have to leave,  
you know so much  
on these islands, the wind  
is always bringing news,

all news is bad, everything new  
is good, the difference blurs  
what you used to think  
was your brain, now not sure,

it's changeable and white,  
surf beating in, seagulls iceskating against the sky  
who knows what's happening,  
you know, that's the trouble,

you know you have to leave  
this island, every island,  
everything is rapt  
in the article of going,

the greater the pleasure the  
greater the pain, that's the way  
it works, and everything  
follows you down the shore,

stumbles, feels the cold  
surge around the ankles,  
decides, decides otherwise,  
*I will not leave this island*

you cry, and then you're gone.

24 June 2003

## **AN EPISODE FROM THE SAGAS**

a horse a man a stumble  
an acceptance of this place  
as the only place

an island  
means I'm here  
and cannot be elsewhere  
by the nature of some fact

built into the stones of the shore  
I stumble on

the way all thoughts  
come back to the same old  
thinking that all my life  
has been thinking me.

24 June 2003

## FINDING THE GROUND

So much space  
so few words

the nation  
to insist

a revolution's  
timeless

a piston  
answering

all that means  
a word is a tone of voice

you spend the summer  
of your life

figuring whose.

I have to tell you what I meant to dare  
a blue exhaustion round your perfect hair  
I had to answer when the cardinal sang  
its martinet objurgations, the phone rang  
in my head there is no one to answer is there  
no one to complain to about the broken pattern  
the death of order, the slacking of a lover's care

because all we are is one another  
doesn't that mean I am you, and we  
some species of shorthand democracy  
birds on the roof in vulgar sunshine  
owning nothing but what happens to us

so few words  
to follow  
what the words  
are saying

they will lead  
everywhere  
fill up all space  
with revelation

disclose  
the act inside  
the actual  
beyond the screen

of seems.

25 June 2003

Cuttyhunk



## PRAYERS

1.

Almost nude  
the gladiator  
sets the lions loose —

Extreme us, o Lord!  
the Christians cry  
and from the neighbor in the sky

a sudden cloudburst comes  
that chills the cats  
drenches them, away

they slink, the martyrs  
pray O rescue our  
poor pious meat!

The emperor, empress,  
the aediles fierce  
all scurry under cover —

hail now, and swirls  
of snow, all thronged  
with lightning flashes

while happy Christians shiver in the sand.

2.

It's a Mormon name  
a kind of mercy  
to have something new to say  
in all that old rock

sandstone sutras  
start with a name

a new name, Nephi,  
Jared, I forget the others,  
they sound like Lamech,

like a Hebrew king  
spoken sideways,  
like a river in Pentecost

between rows of chestnut trees  
in flower, sound  
like nothing I ever heard,

give me, Lord, a new new name  
a name so true so new  
I don't have to remember

I just know.

25 June 2003

Cuttyhunk

## MEASUREMENT

Measure me and find  
there's not so much  
for all my size

informed, not wise,  
impassioned, not inspired,  
all about touch

the skin of mind,  
not the one that tired  
bodies tell their lies.

25 June 2003

Cuttyhunk

## IMPROVEMENTS

For example the poll tax  
the water fountain, there are  
a few improvements but how long  
it takes to get there, *homo*  
*homini lupus* still, kill  
as many as they can  
and then. Then what.  
Let somebody else take  
responsibility. The seed  
of politics in our dumb wind.

Don't think about it.  
Think about God. Think  
what God thinks, even better.

How long before Evolution  
lets us turn off our ears?

26 June 2003

Boston

## THE WANDERER

Not have to know  
what has to need

need and know  
know and need

how many queens  
to sit upon one throne

all the touches  
abdicate control

let happen now  
what no one knows

no one will  
ever know what happened

past or happens still  
or happen will

nobody's need  
erases what you know

no know no need  
all those queens

my lonely throne.

26 June 2003, Boston

