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INTERIM MEASURES

In the interim — just one more word
for what I wanted all along — a road
alongside an immense lake

with gulls and terns to keep me company
and ducks far out, silhouettes in sunglare
and a cold wind. Give me a break

is what I meant, an interruption
in the never-ending recitation
of what must be because one says it so,

this local mind. To whom the loveliest
miscreants come as no surprise.
Give me a break. I have been driving

this rig for almost sixty years.
Squirrels chasing squirrels. The same
always wants more of itself, I want

to throw this paltry ownership,
this suburban franchise in a contract world.
I want the lake. Maybe it's ocean.

A sudden relaxation into that alien
condition, truth. The hard white thing that kills.
Can't be a lake, a lake is limit.

Must be the Maori ocean vast and slowly
veering to the frozen lucid boundary
where something means. And means me.

21 July 1995

TALISMAN

What was this talisman worked from nickel-silver
in an eight-pointed star with garnets for fangs
as if it came towards me from your throat dear lord
or from that famous heart of yours on fire in brambles

on an isle in the middle of one cool lake, peaceful,
you feel the pain but the pain does not change you,
you die but death doesn't change you. The experience
is conscious all the way through the clumsy operation.

They try to burn you with desires, to drown you in
ignorance, pierce you with hatred, spikes, swords,
analyses. You are not amenable to such investigation.

The star red from you rims the blue score of a day done.
I wear the thought of you above my head,
this skull your hill, the same, vast dome in which we live.

At this station we are restored to the Empty Fact.
Crossing emptiness with an absent smile
present to the light of it. Uninterruptable wit of it.

21 July 1995

Late in the dark apart one questions
various semi-precious stones
reputed (by Arabs, witchcraft, Navaho)
to have powers. Central Nervous System
believes everything you tell it, it has
no choice but your information.
South Sea canoe, a kind of calculus
reckoning by falling stars, and hoping.
Hoping hard. People usually want
what comes to them by or in a boat.
A small stone with glints of metal in it.
The clash of migrating tribes depends
on such slender impetuses as
one little wave after another. Whereas
here there is no wind. The pinwheel
has not stirred all night. I'm after something
here but who knows what? The coal miners
of South Yorkshire could make a good guess,
they have seen it now and then down there
mooching along at the end of some gallery
a minute beyond the boundary of the light.
Or our friend Jane must have seen it too,
brought it home tucked in the back of her mind
from the time she sat quiet, quiet, on
a vein of native ruddy copper in the mines at Falun.
Time and desire are separate cosmoses
that sometimes intersect. O woe,
is that overlap what I'm thinking? Is it the earth?

21 July 1995

[Cf Proust, Volume 2, pp. 912-913: the "glorious girl" in the railway compartment, and what time makes happen to our yearning.]

A M B E R

1.
Enough to keep resistance.
From a water pool a vague
remembrance, like a bad
translation, swims to me,

this water, this woman,
this lagoon, heron, cormorant.
At times it is all
a day can do to be now.

Bring you back to life.
The idiom of waterfowl
mysterious in the shadow
of the overhanging cliff

compared to the plain
talk of crows I wake with.
Ink, not pencil. Tree,
not undependable leaf of grass.

2.
Being wholly open
(open as a hole), utterly
open, still to resist.
This is aesthetics,

friction, bearing, Being,
Not Being, the whole
hole. Of contention.
The stuff we mean.

3.
It was Bolinas, some loons

corked on the sheen
of the lagoon, a pelican
had lunch with me.

How alone I always seem
in memory though I hear
the voices of the With Me
womening soft out loud.

And resist that too. Tough
out the amber of memory
and hard by hot a spill

of wax becomes my jewel.
My present. Wear me.
I am the other side of it.

22 July 1995

E D E N

Count this as my part of the tally, the woman
carving a man's face on the wood of her door

then praying to the door so that it opens,
that the tuberculosis stalking in her lungs

might forget about her and go back to the sea
where all diseases come from. To save you.

That's why I list it on my talkie-talkie board,
my balsa wood encyclopedia I have been

cutting pictures in since I could hold a knife,
pictures that look to anybody else like words

but I see right through them. There she is
praying to the door. There he is in his white

sailor's cap and complicated trouser buttons.
There they are in Paradise and the snake is late,

the snake is dead, there is nothing to keep
them from themselves. Nothing but language

between them and the truth.
And they have not yet begun to speak.

I am the witness of their sacrosanct lagoon,
their witless love and thankless mornings—

sunrise and no one to praise! Let them find
the dark of each other, the soft of the back,

the eternally forgotten, far of the moon,
lost meadows of Antarctica, the glad mistake.

22 July 1995

SONG

for Charlotte

Nothing but reporting. A tweak
of sleep that drugs the day.

Away. They say that poetry
does not have need of music

or music does not measure
nowadays the way birds spell

scores on wires in Provence
like notes on staves.

But what they say means
this sweet folderol is all

I can contrive for you, a hum
of nomenclature,

a rattle
of lexicon alone.

23 July 1995

for E.R.

How long it took you to get rid of yourself,
all the short words, fun, feel, touch, sun, some
larger ones like sacrament or intersect
and there you are, mother of an ocean, studying
all the white horses as they stumble from the surf
newly created by the power of salt alone.
Malibu. Marabout. Caribou. A child
(being in-fant) is immune to our vocabulary,
playing dumbly with the actual while you sit
(I sit) conversing with the lovely sham.
Not that I've ever told you a lie as such
(you've lied to me, though, but each of us
has different pleasures) — morality I find is fun.

24 July 1995

Turn time aside

a rapture. A void
waiting for a vulture
to drop in, live wings
bringing dead meat home,

a poetry.

25 July 1995

COLONIAL WAKING

Magnetize me. Some easy words to river in.

Then it's peace. I came downstairs
into the quietest morning. It had birds,
I was rising, birds and traffic. They're back now
but for that strange quarter hour
a silence built entirely of weather: soft

humid warm — I had interrupted
(no one can interrupt) a process of alchemy:
the White was ready and the mysteriousest Blue
(of which not even the rarest tractates speak)
was suddenly ghost-ripe over the meadows.
The gold-work went on, me with it, us with it,
a little, always part of the weather, a little
tendency to gasp for breath in the brute air.

America. Why *here*, of all places? The incompre-
hensible ancestors still busy at their arcane inhabitations
where we must bide. What did they see here?
Is there in all their glamorous difficult westering a goal
it lies in me to achieve, a longitude
no one of my kind has reached, meridian of mind?

Or did they have something altogether else in mind?
A rumpsteak in Amsterdam, a Plymouth prayer.
Why here? What were they looking for in this appalling heat,
what Moravian insights, Puritan manners, Jesuit
ambition led them, such that the shimmering blue heat
of this valley made them say “Here, *hic*
quod petis, this is the gate, the heaven-stile, home.”

26 July 1995

S wain's breath on Hudson —

Delano's parish,
old patent,
now,

suppose it were now.
Suppose we hear.

Hear this my sing-song, arbalest
no slingshot, my rin-ram-ruf

(when comes my Chaucer,
lady of Histoire? Were you displeased

with all my venturings?

Posture
of a man at prayer,
Air-conditioned cathedral way out North Charles,
"I built a wall around my heart" the loud
speaker sings. Should I believe
this brusque machine?

26 July 1995

COACH HOUSE

Harness. Oiled tack. Blur
of light on leather, almost
in leather, so soft the interact,

the answering skin.

Take this in.

Caress this mispronunciation—
when I say this place don't think this
is what I mean, only a wind you hear,
not word,

don't count on it,

a word is wind I breathe.
But I breathe it to you.

27 July 1995
Rhinebeck

Elegy for zàepa

An interlude in the Society of Garnet,
the hard old secret reds who mostly
recollect — memory is the one
place Revolution really works,

to change at will,

to drink the son's blood
with the mother's lips.

27 July 1995
Rhinebeck

And now after a whole day of day
heaving with humidity
and a new table come to our house

I feel the wood of the floor with the skin of my foot,
that makes me a patriarch, a banal
ancient ordinary man, I confess it,

on an ordinary earth with actual wood
touched by actual foot, my plain old skin
a mood of transcendental levity

as when a Liszt unlimbers at the big black wing
and thunders harmonies, I greet you from afar,
télégrapheur sans fils, I go unsounded

into posterity, sending messages, unsounded
into the sweet Irish sex of politics,
I travel to be free

of grammatical relations,
a porcupine in the clouds, innocent again forever,
blue foot, timbering weather,

o beautiful rain
the sky falls down
porpentine was Shakespeare's name for it.

28 July 1995

VENTURE CAPITAL

(What we do with what we're not)

Dark enough to see. A line
is pottery, the song
originates in oven air,

the cream of nescience
rising to the top of sense,
beleaguer me.

The air locked inside the clay,
the wind inside a stone
that keeps it *one*,

keeps it listening to itself.
A throb of Old Believers
come

chivvying the poor girl's actual face
with genetic possibilities
until she looks like her name

the way we become alas
what only other people thought we were,
and then we are.

So I looked at all their skills and colors
and matched a drizzly mist
against the old white wall of my house

and called it by a philosophic name
like 'real' or 'normal'

or 'this is the world.'

But it wasn't the world, it was the brief
intermezzo of the not yet died,
our gluey love songs

stitching thing to thing and them to them.

The dead

are the only things we have to understand.

28 July 1995

QUININE WATER

Too quiet to think
or a lady plays with a marmoset
on her lap, the beast
fingers the diamonds round her throat.

Are we there yet?
Has the thinking begun? Is the hydrangea
blue enough for you never?
Do they call you the Lord of Mousetraps,

kettles, antique autos,
piano bars? Do you remember Nureyev
that afternoon at Bass Rocks
when the eyes of the town and your eyes held

for one flicker the secret
of being a body in motion and in meaning
that he was, then it passed, glum,
erased in something you said or anybody said,

and he passed you your tonic, ice in it,
with a hand that was just a hand
of somebody passing a drink
and you were lost, suddenly, in loss itself,

right there in the midst of the hopelessly gone
still there at your fingertips.
Still moving through the little bar
before we all went back to the Castle.

We go finally from place to place a lot
with not much meaning,

the geese have their seasons, reasons
enough. And we have at most

the vagrant quiet of the heart
to send out seeking local music.

29 July 1995

AT DEL'S DAIRY CREME

I want to patch
things up with my stars,
want them to forgive me
for forgetting
the degrees and the figurae,
all the symbols of my subjugation,

the deep insistences of Sagittarius,
the blue goose-foot of Uranus
waddling through the icy otherness of my art—
out there, rings on his fingers,

and red hot Luna balsamed late in Lion
(who *am* I?)
and twistfoot Saturnus
sloshing backwards through the Fish
to get away from my laziness and save
his excellent analytic (angel mythic, angry lithic)
mind fixed on Clarity

from the disparity I am, a renunciate
in summer heat
waiting for the frozen yogurt at
a little place outside of time
where all the stars in shorts and sandals drive,

o it is time to live.

29 July 1995

