

9-1995

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I wonder what I've done with all my willing?  
A day fits in a season without my help,  
one more Masonic mystery I profane  
by breathing. Morning ritual  
and at nine o'clock some other man's  
hammering in the woods. Why or what  
this mysterious conspiracy from the beginning,  
or of the beginning?  
What is this cabal of the utterly be pure?  
The way you beat a maple tree  
with a fallen branch to make the sap rise.

A noise that makes me worry,  
what are they pretending  
to add to the world now?  
One filament of spider thread  
I see it spinning slowly  
from the wren house to the boxwood,  
that's plenty, it gleams,

gleams, and here comes Michael's gift of  
chili peppers, a dozen colors of hot, even three  
of the fatal orange habañero, I save those  
for the end, pickle them in apple  
vinegar, like sunlight. Like saving sunlight.

12 September 1995

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“They’re both preening  
themselves” (of ducks  
she says). Rossini’s  
*Tancredi* is raining  
in the other room  
a car slips sweet on asphalt.  
The table shakes. House  
on shale. Morning riff #2.

13 September 1995

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Write down the difference  
between reading and inscribing

(one is reading, one is writing,  
tell the difference) one

between the reading and inscribing  
is simply writing down

the differences between  
telling and telling

telling and told (one  
is reading, reading is ready

one is writing, writing  
is right) the difference

is shades of down  
between saying and staying.

14 September 1995

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They are confusing, because colors.  
One feels the same as another,  
a hand touching a hand.

Only the current is different, the vril  
in all this vrac, Baron Reichenbach  
and odic force, the plummeting needles  
of the Amor-i-scope. Tell us

we have been touched.  
It goes us in this rapt staying.

14 September 1995

## LEPROSY

All I wanted was to feel  
and there was a disease (a religion)  
that blocked precisely that,  
a mortal anesthesia and there I was  
across the street from everyone  
trying not to see the ads for  
psoriasis creams in dirty windows  
on Fulton Street all summer  
carrying my skin like a grail to give them.  
And Adam's fingers reach back to God's hand.

14 September 1995

## BENEFIT OF CLERGY

Not abased by the mercy of kneeling, Sir Feather knelt in his family pew. We forgive as we are forgiven, it occurred to him. Lordliness passes between. Forgiving is a kind of giving, and must go from hand to hand. From one to one. God is to us as we are to others, because each gods it in this little world I am. Or that I see as being. A proud Feather and what kind of man?

He could bear such a name with pride, like one of those ancient and more than honorable families that bore as main charge in their coats of arms some strange, even some silly, beast — a fretted porcupine, a mole, a dace, a coney — yet so comport themselves the silly seemed so no more, but took on, given the prodigious achievements of the family, an air of mystery and the arcane, a sacred totem with the ear of heaven. Thus the foolish fish swimming across the shield seemed just as charged with power as the white pigeon that is shown in Christian churches standing in for the immense, unseeable operations of the most Holy Spirit.

There it was, for instance, silver-pale in the Nineteenth-Century blue glasswork over the priest's head. The colors they dared!

The name Feather anciently was 'further,' used because he who first endured the strange given name had lived on the edge of elsewhere, over the hills and past the marshes, where the rocks and cold weather began, and quite ordinary people spoke Welsh.

Lordliness passes from hand to hand. Royally I forgive you, royally you me. You forgive me. In this sainted reciprocal our bodies

are healed. Oh what a smooth talker language is! Sir Feather may have thought as he kneeled deeper at the tingle of the sacring bell, and the priest — his cousin, God help us — raised in her cool white familiar fingers the chewy index of the Lord they both loved.

He looked and was healed of his distance. Looked harder and was healed harder of his precious difference, just a minute or a moment, just a sign. A sign of some coming season when his sense of himself could be laid aside with his shirt and his viyella socks, a dream of pastness and a fresh breeze comes.

But not yet, Lord, he understood, and understood it was an accepted thing, for those who pray, to pray for not quite now. And for those who are prayed to, to grant, but not quite yet. Those who suffer a delay in the fulfillment of their prayed-for wishes must pardon Omnipotence for the habits we have taught It.

The bells stopped ringing, and people slipped their bottoms firmly back onto the benches and furtively rubbed their kneecaps that felt all creased with their weekly piety.

The priest, not a full year gone by yet since her ordination, was saying her service with exploratory thoroughness, still learning the meanings deep beyond the ancient words whose shadows played now and then on the rather casual, shabby, language of the Church's current prayer book. She spoke the Mass words with interest, mouthing them with still-fresh delight, like a lover getting to know her lover's body, even if the lover didn't have the greatest body in the world. What does it mean to have a body, or give a body, to be substance, to be?

Sir Feather liked such listening as he let himself do now. As he waited for the people's communion, he watched the priest's hands

dart in and out of the white sleeves of the alb, watching her take, for herself, and give, to him, such serious pleasure in her operations.

Later, standing in the cool galilee, its stone walls pierced by trifoliate amber windows, modern glass, Sir Feather enjoyed the aftertaste of bread, of wine, and waited graciously his turn to take his cousin's hand and say something nice about service and sermon. These were the first she had offered in this church she had attended the many years of girlhood, young womanhood, she had lived in Sir Feather's household, in his long, drab, comfortable, old falling to pieces house among the willows.

He felt comforted now, not especially by the service, but by his own gracious wish to please her. Even waiting on line to do so, something he did not care to do in the common run of things, of days, even waiting seemed pleasant. As if in obedience to the peculiar mathematics somehow built into religion, the longer he waited for her attention among the crowd of exiting worshippers, the longer God would wait for him. And after all, it is good to be alive. Thinking in ways like that, he waited for the touch of her hands.

15 September 1995

## WORDS

Some words when written backwards mean the same thing. ‘Beauty,’ for instance, or ‘evasion of responsibility,’ or ‘millstream.’ Try it. You hear the roar of the propellers, the hush hush hush of water lapping down the stairs, the sky in the cellar. These things know you. They’ve been waiting all these years for you to fill in the moat, pull up your shadow and leave home. Your wings are not powerful enough to stay.

16 September 1995

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Picture the alternatives—

a cloud with eyes,

a book with a road inside.

The only friend I ever had was lost at sea.

In me.

16 September 1995

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Down her nose a lank of her hair drifts  
like a lesson in curvicle geometry.  
No such word? Tell them to look under pretty,  
fashionable, long forgotten, lost  
in other words the way a church tower  
gets lost in ivy. August. But you know it's there.

16 September 1995

# NATURE

Let the word shaped like a tower  
out of its tower.  
Let the word that sounds like a bird  
fly over the former.  
A flag for a new queen!  
Green playthings for the wind!  
And finally after ten thousand years  
the ocean goes to sleep.

17 September 1995  
KTC

# X

Exasperated by ex-less words  
in his mild language, he bruised  
a grape inside his slice  
of huckleberry pie, thickened  
with tapioca (an import  
out of South America) and the grape  
was luminous and sweet  
with its own dulcessa amidst  
the pie's heavy duty syrups.  
The grape. This is all about  
something sweet in something sweeter,  
something loose and limpid, sharp  
and nothing but itself and then  
not even that. You've swallowed  
the grape and a crow is calling—  
why is a crow in the rain  
like a green grape in blueberry pie?

17 September 1995

ANGER. ALTAR. AUGURY.

1.

We dig down to know where to heap up, and do,  
and there it is, a cairn or cube, of stones,  
addressed to the sky. And there we look,

there we look again,, having stared the first time  
long and soft at the blue to know  
where on this earth we are.

*Premise:* Every place on the earth casts a shadow on the sky. By  
examining the shape and movement of that shadow, the Wise know  
what sort of a place it is whereon they stand, wherefrom they look.  
This is the first augury study the bare sky.

It tells you where to build altars, put up poles, fly flags, plant beans.

2.

And if it were a matter of another altar,  
one quick-built and no lime  
to hold one idea upon another,

and it were us, just as we are  
when we let ourselves be,  
would this be the other?

3.

On a wet floor  
someone slips.  
Signs are everywhere,  
summer, then fall.  
You understand,  
you can read them  
as you go.

4.

And then why  
has it happened  
in you again,

the blade  
that speaks,  
the sense  
that kills  
like silence.

18 September 1995

## AMSTERDAM SONNETS

1.

Little did I know how much I would Dutch things.  
The pelf of Amstel, with a gull on everything  
and blue bowls mild with cheeses. Sluices  
quassated with coots. Quietest of city nights,  
worthy population thrilled with sex and reading.  
And dawn so late, cloud dim with remembering.  
For nothing is forgotten here, no gable with no gibbet,  
it takes six or eight philosophies to walk home.  
So many bridges in their simple clothes, the health  
of women, the bicycles whiffing by like Isis  
her sistrum shaken tinny with affection under  
these private skies. Narrow houses in love  
with narrow houses, staircases no wider  
than the one who mounts. Everything touches here.

2.

Outside, the bicycles are tethered. Inside, their riders  
eat cheese sandwiches and ginger beer. Well-fed ectomorphs,  
slim mesomorphs, banting endomorphs — everybody  
looks healthy, everybody looks good. Streets  
are made for everybody, seriously. Older types  
eat honey-drenching koninkswaffels in cafes.  
I generalize. It's always the specific that storms  
suddenly the gates of feeling. And the feeling  
is always general in its fashion: after all I have  
only one heart to hear, one chest to heave  
sighs with complicated histories of regret,  
one vascular system to convulse with shame,  
the high old embarrassments of love.  
All these women on Dutch bicycles!

19 September 1995

## WHAT HE TOLD HER

1.

Be organized as a receptacle of grace,  
be space. Be red, he told his shadow  
and infiltrate the hijinx of the spirit

because you are valley and are wet, and you  
—sunset sunrise a garnet for a brain —  
you are the mountain too, the tops of trees

and so be red, soft as fire in fire, smooth  
as a letter in the alphabet, the kind  
like a that breathes in everywhere.

2.

And “you are” he told his shadow,  
you are more of me than me,  
you succeed me when I totter, and I totter,

you are brunch again and Gramercy, you are tree  
on the cusp of autumn and I told you  
you are red. Do shadows listen?

3.

If they do he takes them to the city, installs themselves  
in a commodious hotel and walks around the music,  
they walk around the block they walk around in a haze of money

and come home later to the trees with bundles.  
Because of water they keep on drinking,  
the earth is full of food for them, food and doors and they are red,

and there is nothing she can't read as language.  
Then one last time he chose to overflow: river bed

and all the silvery dubious fill-me!s of desire. And in one night

all the people of that land he was were lifted in a rapture  
to the pure lands of hard practice and fulfillment.

Tapes unspooled in empty houses, all year long halloween.

This is what you give me with your listening.

20 September 1995

## AFRICAN BIRD

“The hammerkop a bodhisattva bird”  
she said it builds  
beyond its means beyond its uses  
and everyone else uses  
what it intends, the fashion  
of building so huge and so stable  
a nest, rafters in the trees, snug  
hostelry and then

the hammerkop the bodhisattva bird  
flies off, the two of them  
fly off and do it more, they work in pairs,  
and build some more  
till all the other birds and little tree rats  
and vagrant lizardry move in

and the pair of hammerkops are far  
always working in a mystery  
beyond their means, beyond  
their own and not for their own  
from which all others benefit.

I remember the one that perched beside us,  
small for what it does, big for a bird to be that near us,  
and looked at us a-tilt the way they do, birds do,  
one hammerkop, one bodhisattva bird  
we had seen darting through humid foliage  
now stood beside us on a wooden railing  
and looked at us sideways the way they do  
and let us look, and talk out loud, marveling I guess  
at this quick brown so close to us peaceful bird,  
then flew, they fly fast, a brown big  
bird like a little heron, light brown,  
with a long straight beak and most

remarkable growth of feathers dense, taut-tufted back  
out and up from the back of the head when the bird's erect

makes the head a hammer, hammerkop, and then too  
the feathers like flat in flight and the bird  
looks like any other big bird or tiny heron homing  
on its way to its blessed busy tree.

*Hammerkop*, we read, the god bird of Africa,  
its builds strong refuges all others occupy.  
It rules the weather (also called Lightning Bird)  
and controls the floods. It stood again  
beside us while we read  
and left us to puzzle, god-bird,  
a serenity surround us  
in the moment of its inspection

and when it flew it left  
no sense of abandonment.  
Months later we saw two on tv  
and recognized instantly the holiness,  
the strange serene quick helpful power,  
a spirit bird, a god, a something live  
and very strange, before the unseen overvoice said  
hammerkop, or lightning bird.

21 September 1995

## SCHEDULES

Day "Rain." Day "Recompenses."  
Depending on the calendar. Day  
of Dakinis. Day of Jove,  
Giovedì, Jupiter who is also  
Pluvius, rainmaker, and a big white bird.

In all this daying, there is a loop  
called week, a Jewish thing  
or Babylon,  
to trap by sevens  
what pours continuous unbounded going  
and make it come again.

No w everybody weeks.  
We are caught  
in coming.  
Some weeks are bigger than others,  
are months, tens, thirteens, twenties,  
but they week and week again.

I want a week as long as a life!  
And now I knew I have one, the week  
called one life and come again.  
And then I want no weeks but knowing.

21 September 1995