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THE TYRANNY OF FACES

The hurrying calendar the week.
Speak Geek. Talk Dork.
The magazines repeat the same smiles—
by their grimaces shall ye know them,

gnaw them in the aisles, with your eyes,
Mazagine and Populova, they stare
back from deep within their coated stock,
they look right through you, they gleam,

instancers of the commanding Glance.
To which the hypnotizing Gaze responds
(for it is a kind of marriage). Gelled
in one maloculation, vague means pretty,

rage against the faces that command you so.
See Dante. See nothing. What
do blind men do to get obsessed?
Can you dwell so upon brute hearing?

Not the music but the timbre, not the words
but the soft aperture of the lips, the touch
of lip and lip, not the words but speaking?
Not the footstep but the resonant stair,

are they in love with the instrument alone?
Is it for the blind man always as it is
at the end of Strauss's *The Rose Cavalier*,
women upon women woven

to make the ears behold?
Silver union, rimless silk, space folded
into space. The more you hurry
the harder you look. The hungrier.

And it holds you. Hard as your desire

was at the bridge in Florence. Weeping
punishes the eyes for what they did,
traitors, faithful only to what they see.

Said Dante. The mechanism that stirs up in me
another symphony, said the Viennese,
staring at nothing, nothing any more.
Let me see my way clear beyond seeing,

let me be an idiom of the dark, a cliché
of clenched hands, a full pocket,
a taste of rye. Said the song. And Ella's
basket, green and yellow, a child

in every age will load it with fresh grass.

8 December 1995

PIONEERS

I would be a pioneer of rights.
Of grievances.

1.

The bitter answers of Revolutionary committees,
the rhetoric that unhumans the heart.
Men and women got on well enough till I was born,
I think it's my fault, this civil war.

I knew there was something wrong with the word 'natural.'
I knew that subjunctives were important,
footnotes, derivatives, Indian spices,
cupboards floor to ceiling, shadow.

I knew that something was wrong with summer
that winter doesn't cure.

Too few flags,
too many languages, is that what I meant?

2.

Was he just Bosnia? Remember
his Mohammedan phase (Doughty, scimitar,
alphabet, gazelles), remember his period
of taking the Eucharist from a golden spoon
proffered by a bearded foreigner,
to taste the Lord. Remember
his mountains and his sea, how he needs
both and has neither.

Where can this man live?

3.

Where the mountains walk right up to the sea.
Enbothed and boldened he could then speak
in his native tongue at last. The air itself
would understand him.

Where the shadow of a gull
glides down the mountainside, and the rock
does all his talking for him and the wind is his wife.

8 December 1995

A R O U N D L E T T E R

I was going along wondering about you I was going under a boat
wondering about flumes above me the flames of water current on the
alpenstand of these sodden rocks my nature is incumbent on itself to
propose night by night a separable honesty demissed from precise
accounts of one by one the men and women of the welfare we bring
them by dint of ice and this storm on its way who can tell the
aggrieved particulars of every pilgrim's happenstance the wealth is
gaudy gay he grieves to be part of all that process the fun of a tree in
the shade thereof he promised her dates and things like figs and the
bleak black shadows of winter trees bore the most curious fruit the
disagreeable song-in-hand of the Queen of Gelderland spilled her wax
on whose dim lap because of sconces wrenched from the wall to flare
a musketeer's preposterous escrime up and down the paltry stairs a
bishop chases many a knight with fulminant rhetoric the lord is
waiting for the least of these birds to fall oh well I wonder will the
appetite be equal to the tooth that waits in someone's mother sent out
to smoke her lonely cigarette along the winter oh did you know that
smoking in itself is an act of isolation it is the caring of the daring it is
the father sent off to sea to bring home one perfect wave carved in
steatite or jade for his lone wife and for his daughters three he has to
carve one a moon and one a sun and one the arch that leads directly to
next week without the inconvenience of tomorrow oh if I have to ask
her again she will be weary of me what is the mess I leave on the

precipice above her what is the horn which ox lifts above what
mountain groaning loudly and if they did not taste the corn how will
the wheat deceive them and if the water flowing down the Yellow
River doesn't answer the dark of the toaster oven what is the point of
morning if it doesn't bring you utterly and altogether all the way into
the world? There is a cliff after there failed a mountain you see the
glint of the snow on the rim of it the crest bent like a man's arm or a
woman's shoulder over the crackpot distances this fasting republic is
made of scandal after scandal until the brock sniffs out of his den and
the lime tree fills up its hollows with new snow oh the bleak
predictions of our morrows why must we listen to the weather isn't it
bad enough to freeze in our places like an army slain in a dream and
waking only long enough to die because the battle never ended and
the night was full of gambling the way the priests from their altars
called out the magical formulae we allow to them by which the stars
are sudden and the guesses of God fall sprawling over our celebrated
hides oh touch me with such remorse as I wake to bite this is the
news and you are listening this is the brick baked in the fire of
someone paying attention what a miracle how could it last take off
your eyes isn't the dark enough can't you eat the inside out of the
sparrow-busy air and tell me what the inside of the light is like and
how different it must be from what we see because we are never
looking are we just mirror-locked in arduous gaze to make the thing
seen reel back to us and coil around our seeing and fall speechless into
our final arms as if this was what the world wanted all along and
never knew and only we and only now and here we are and don't
believe it. There is nothing that the world wanted. It all was miracle

as long as you could lift your hand and press your fingertip however gently on the preposterous miracle of anything else anything that wasn't you and certainly can't be me I can't be waiting for you I have been running since the beginning this is not the time for me to stop whole new continents the other side of Africa are waiting for me and how could anyone move as fast as I and yet you can by virtue of your disposition what is that to have moved as fast as thinking can to have flown like a flag in the empty sunsets until the marks you mean and the colors you even are are lost in the flimmer of the common dark and how can I wait for you then and how can you wait for me going as fast as we certainly so differently are would it be worth it to stay would it be worth it to linger beside because the book of the morning is tedious with news and yet the whim of it renews our wills when we wake in our far entitlements the battlements of individual castle-keeps oh who is wondering now of all our sailors who breathe their way through all the syllables of the sea to trick us home and we are never home there is never any light in the sky I look at people in the blaze of faces there is an only glory that I see when I mean merely to look upon and suddenly behold all laughing paradise in a crease of cheek a dimpled monstrosity of the most high on a midday hour borne into my midst like a platter carried by a young girl into the banquet hall where quarreling men are indifferent to the taste of food but I am not. "A feeling is only something that you feel." A will is waiting in every wood to know me better than I want my wish to be known though I would my word be heard hear it hear it in the tree in the delicate webwork of the duck's foot the shear of sound through the subway tunnel the train lurching out of the tube into the desolate station hear it

in the cardboard soaked by snow waiting to be picked up by who
know who and carried who knows where once once it had bottles in it
and in the bottles juices from trees that do not grow here as many trees
as we have they are not those who is listening when I am so busy
begging do you understand I am on my knees begging and the altar
where I pray is uncertain it is marble it is wood lacquered red as the
inside of any one of our bodies gold as sunset on earth where are they
waiting who will come to relieve us from this everlasting bivouac
hunkered down in the mud of the luteplayers the soaked grass of the
guitar hear the word I'm begging to speak in the broken glass bluer
than highways the speculative glance in the stranger's eye the one
coming through the door and the smoke of all their breaths in the cold
clarity of the sudden distance an open door an open door are you
listening I bet you are not paying enough attention I bet you are not
planning to meet me under the oak at noon and under the cloud at
midnight I bet you forgot your oath I made you promise I bet you
forgot the island you carved out of the thought of the sea and left there
among bleating seawinds I bet you forgot to come to me at the corner
where no one was waiting and everyone is. That is all right I can
forgive things like that I know the language things like that are
speaking all the time the day brow and the waking stone the artifact
cracked like a telephone in a bombed house and there are no hands
left anymore to hold it how can you talk without holding something in
your hand how can you talk without touch and tell without tincture the
rainbows themselves reach down to touch the earth abstract for them
substantial for us and look what folklore tells us happens where they
land that is where the rim of colored thought touches the uncolorable

suchness of the planet and gold becomes and becomes because that is transmutation and beginning because things happen out of other things and nothing stops not even long enough for me to speak a plausible name and so I have to call you you all the time until you hear me and even after that when we have finished the preliminaries and are just beings sharing a crust of bread and the tune of somebody tossing a song out the window who wants that even then we will be just you and me and you will look deep in my shifty eyes deep as every you can and I wonder if you can and what you'll see will be a tiny person like a god in emerald or amber a tiny lass or lad that you call me and I call you because in the deepest eye of the other we see ourselves such is the palimpsest of mirrors that runs the world and always will and still I want it all to hear me and it all to touch me till I wake. [8 December 1995] Why you? Entropy hears me and Rossini lies on the pillow of his death bed why do things keep coming back why doesn't the bird that flies away just fly away instead of letting linger forever his shadow on this house oh who can live with the shadow of a bird for all the hours that you listen the oboe of disquiet insinuating reverie into the pale folds of your wakefulness until the part of you that faces the window is secretly praying to the door and the door is listening but then every single thing is listening but no one ever does no number listens no shadow ever studies the pathway to the exit where the old men wait with their goats and their peculiar smells to challenge exiters with riddles and puzzles and stupid traditional conundrums and there the poor people are trying to flee from the broken house the burning house the drowning house the airless house the house with a tornado in every closet an earthquake in

the attic the house full of wings and all they're trying to do is get away and these old fossils with their eternal questions and their precisions and their clearly communicated sense that they know something you don't know and yet one look at them tells you they don't know anything of any value whatsoever how could they know anything what does what they know help them they are so old and broken toothed and stupid and smell bad and you don't know the answers to their questions so you wind up loving them even falling in love with them the way the sparrow falls in love with a sunflower seed it didn't know existed ten seconds ago and will have forgotten a moment from now when the bell rings and it flies away leaving as always its shadow and you're left with the old men and old women and what do you do with all the pleasant fermatas that hold music still against your passionate ear?

8/9 December 1995

POINT BLANK

The ~~skill~~, he wants to be able to cross things out
skill as if a life could be revised, scribble a new
page

of nothingness. A word like that scares nobody.
That such much music meant
got us Mozart, the Requiem, who is asking?
throatwise the me of us. & when we're asking for peace, whom do
we imagine
And the you hearing us? When we will not for a
moment stop?

abiding.
A point where no goes.

2.
The psaltery of sense
plays curious bibles on us.
Yes, even a year later I like that well
enough,
the old psalm book with all our lusts and reflexes in it, all
the tricks we play on ourselves from this day forward, and there is no
new world waiting,
just this meager glory that means us so well. Trust this
book, love,

it answers nothing. But it lets you ask.

(A text from November 1994)

10 December 1995

Upload this in the orders of your whimsy
the broken chapel with the wind at prayer
constantly like a dozen nuns

and what we pray for is a Buddha's hand
to open and disclose the old dried flower
he once held up to answer

what was the question? Was there a God
or was there anything at all worth saying
when every living thing was suffering?

A harmless flower, a smile
that did not lead them into error—
I hide from the wind in the chapel,

haunted and frightened by the sheer
weight of all this stone
piled all round me and above me

to lock me in from heaven
so I will do it here, me and the wind,
me and the imaginary nuns the empty prayer

the songs psalms serenades the slop
of feeling and the touch of truth,
me and the mind from which I fell

sprawling into these amazing differences.

10 December 1995

