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Catching up with silence
is a sort of sea city

old Baltic steeples
round as Russia
blue as Samarkand

but inside those names
is a child with open eyes

staring at the luscious shadows of his mind
the words cast

that is why it is

given to us to listen.

14 August 1993

REMEMBERING THE AIR

Exemplifying a natural impulse
to interact with weather --
can any be other than natural?
-- who broke that glass?
Who named the Colorado
red? I watch the centerfielder
shift leisurely to the wall
waiting for trouble. Far away
an orchestra is playing Dvorak.
Down there the fitful yellow
lights of Kalamazoo.

14 August 1993

THE PRIVILEGES

The one you can see
alludes to the invisible
one who touches me
hence maybe you

but feelings are never
aren't they
 they fall
from heaven and live an hour

and the skin —that sky—
is louder than my mind

Can I think you also
have signed the starry contract

can I trust your feelings
those ings we have no language to endorse?

Or have only language to endorse?

Am I supposed
to know
a different way
here

a parable of space and difference?
Can I trust your rhythm?

As if into space
hours after one scant rain
a sudden breeze
made the leaves weep

quick splatter in sunlight

We live in the house of what we did
desert spaces
landscape of absolute result
marred wisdom
Mohave and in Arabia once
the Empty Quarter
that sounds like my name
Rubat al- Khali—

are afterimages of passion
after desire scorches its object
or hatred levels it
or brute indifference leave it
in the sand alone

What we do to the earth
is not just done with shovels and cigars

He's reaching for it now
he keeps it in his clothes

his skin his feelings
the scar of manhood
the huge turbulent confusion it is *to feel*

He's reaching what what he never told,
unity and gunshot and wet moss
polygala flower purple over the quick stream
three springs ago
and all he knows

comes talking to him now

they never left or were never there,
autumn breeze on a summer day,
not the cool of it but the *move* of it,
the way time too has a weather of its own

All of them are speaking in him now
when all their names should be asleep

they are him now
the delicate cloaca of the memory
finding its outlet as the body he is.

15 August 1993

Eyes are not for looking
out of
they are for collecting
the inflections of the light
that mean the world
to those who see by way of them,

tolerate what is seen.
Then be gradual, be Fibonacci
by sunflower, be numerical
in the bleak proportions —
an animal waits by water.

What is it? What is an animal?
Question tone with open mouth,
needing nurture, an infant
all the days of its life,

a cat maybe or a fish deep below Sargasso
hungry for air.
“The sun is hot today” (he said),
“I am committed to the obvious.”

Rest a man by his many remarks,
stand him in the corner of the library
while a woman walks away from the cloying mind.

24 October, 2016

BRIDGE TO BROOKLYN

Putting the folklore in where the Green
Man finds his sweetheart
under the arches of the bridge
and Roebling watched them from his tower
five flights up and a man to lift him,
spyglass to his accurate eye,
paralyzed in Brooklyn he sees them love,

for such as these I brought the world together
thinks, moraine now linked to bedrock mainland,

man land (no fossils in Manhattan), woman island
where he rests in his paralysis and sees, sees
the minarets of actual obsession
rise above her vulnerable skin

“there is no history” an island
is all arriving

(at his window,
with a spyglass,
watching the caissons let down,
the deaths of men
the forfeit to the crossing,

watching the roadway bend
“like a bowe newe-bent in Heaven”
over the estuary’s reach

(or a bowl
shivered and mended
time after time,

the sky is so frequently dented,
tinkered back together
by the travellers

who knew the spells,
the gypsy whisper quieted rogue stallions
or made running water
safe to cross
without your soul

falling out

and hammered smooth
the dents in my father's fenders—
a spell for Roebling!
to hold it in the air
and silver never turn black!
my father told me
all this history
and Nora held me snug
patting me till I learned to feel.

And this is what she taught me:
a woman comes to me
out of water

and that was all my information.

I have to work it out,
a French girl from the mountains, a father,
a paralyzed man watching them build his bridge,
blinding white sand of the outwash plain,
folklore of the island
I am no one but the flatlands I was born
bay cut in or narrow bight
where they took flounders, sheepsheads, flukes
and the sea came in like a bell cracking.

15 August 1993

THE MATHEMATICS

for Charlotte

Count the days on base Six the nights
on base Seven, there are species
of flowers that expel their seeds
violently at midnight, at a windy signal,
yearning for outward like those faces
I used to see when the New York Central
slid on the el through high Harlem,
eyes at the window, pollening glance.

Now number is only a memory
like the blind man's moon,
still there but no benefit
except far away the water in his
obedient cells, the tide.

Because day and night are different gods
and rule from different capitals,
their angry angels flourish different flags.
Or so I was gossiped by the Lord of Invisible Rain
while we idled over a strong noisette
waiting for his sister the Lady of Lightning.
"And we read the paper with different hands."

2.

Once was a number once
and the only other one was now.

Adding the two together they got language
and begot me, and in due course I was born

where you were born, in the cave
of the simplest number

and for all our counting and accounting
we have no science yet.

For there is nothing that numbers *know*.

16 August 1993

FL A G S

An arm coming out of a cloud
grasping a sword — you've seen in
as a Victorian Tarot card,
now learn it is *le drapeau de jour* —
the national ensign of the Day.

Night's banner is the same except
the sky has darkened; the hand
has let the sword falls and rests now
relaxed along the sky, open.

16 August 1993

MEDITATION

1.

I watch the squirrel poise then leap
ten times his body length
almost vertically to the bird feeder.
70° angle. What with our huge strong
bodies can *we* do? What is the knack
our nature gives us?

We can last.

We are built
with enlightenment in mind

for us and other beings.
We are slow to die—
that is our muscle
and our miracle,
those four score maybe years.

Twelve good years is all that Milarepa needed,
twelve or twenty good years
of hard clear meditation,
enduring the nature of mind
without distraction

and our Buddha nature's manifest.
Twelve good years, or thirty,
fifty, we have them, most
of us have them,

that is what we're *for*.

Our muscles poised to know,
be clear, and benefit.
There is nothing more.

2.

My father retired at sixty
and spent the next thirty years
looking out the windows,

a far light in his eyes,
smoking a slow cigar.

I don't know whether he attained
or whether there is anything to be attained,

his eyes were full of light and silence.

That image of him sitting there
enrages me, to do nothing
for thirty years, and consoles me:
nothing has to be done.

3.

Some day the perceiving suddenly slips
back and falls away like a chair
a prankster pulls out behind you.
One falls into the nature of the perceiver,
objectless. Terrifying. Me.

4.

Look out the window till you become glass.
Then shatter. Then say what you have to say.

16 August 1993

BESEECHING THE BRIDGE

Beseeching the bridge
“ . . . will be done”
but on Water, the planet
is named Water,
tell us another

it has rained all night

the yellow grass and stunted corn perk up
—is this rain in time?
where else could it fall?

Let the rain alone to fall
uncommented
the Dragons may forgive us
our bad minds.

Blue curl around the world
blossoms random
I have stared at the picture
till it became me

my father said *I saw this face*

now no more shall we privilege
the eyes those pioneers

Who now beseech
the median release—

cloaca maxima
all our sins to sea

in us,
“to sea in a sieve”

to strain our lives out
and find the irreducible

crystals of remorse at last
inside the nightmare of the will.

Heard nothing yet,
Bayeux was still to be

Beethoven a pool of light laid
aslant the estuary

and a church is god, you know,
we have no other,

the church itself, the building, the hard
one single stone

*complected of many
it is our holy*

and by it we know the way.

Sheep cough on Goathland Moor
where no stone stands
under the pitiful jets
harsh over Whitby

by a bad pun of British history

no stone on that moor

we shield our eyes
from such promises

let the whole body
celebrate the light!

Teiresias knew the answer:
23rd Street at teatime

money relents
we return to our bodies again

seeking a common language.
Eternal marriages within

all we have is place.

Rhapsody and broken wing
barren land my wished-for green

and found his mother's skeleton
as if the earth were whispering back

stone by stone.
It is the spaces, matter

(a crossed t, a man dies,
an old meditator in the desert

leans on a makeshift crutch
like all of us

what we have
is *time*,

not a duration
but a consciousness of now

that now is ours,
all happening

suspended
into pure noticing,

wordlessly know.

Leave the animals alone,
they are boundary stones

between you and the vast
country you are coming from

as if this were a diary
and this voice my own

camber of roads
since a horse knows

I sat in the rain and said
I will move the boundary markers

until the land is the size of myself
and a bird can fly its whole life long

and never leave the limits of my land.

17 August 1993