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Having the occasion is a new language
a Turk singing with shuttered eyes
glitter round her corners, a house
is singing to us slender, a tune
the television sneaks into your room
oily with microtones — it fits
anywhere, rhymes with nothing,
you find it frozen on your windshield
this morning like the smell of bread
— never tastes good as it smells—
or pipe tobacco —even less so— and you scrape
with the side of your poor thin hand
not quite in vain to let the glass through
the ordinary northern light. She also
is a mother of it. Ice slick, tannish
a tall-necked solemn crested grebe.

1 December 1993

-
Big gull
perched
on a crown no
seven different
gulls as if they were
seven jeweled prongs
up from this crown once
ruled over the ever ocean
ride now the roof of the houses of
Amsterdam whose stepped gables
of old purple brick for example endure to preside
over the slender intelligent business of fitting into
every quick instant of every single day the art of
eternity our old Dutch smooth admirable ruddy
art of every minute living to mind's full so every
thing you touch with pale intelligent fingers has
texture and flower and history and answers you.

*Written in honor of the houses of the Herengracht near the
Leidsegracht. 1 December 1993*

So suppose a wind from another country
spoke the land speech in our skin,
a million pores become an audience
and everybody in Europe last week was
breathing Russian air. Suppose a silence
that belongs to us, our own, our lovely one
is ready as a rock is always, to submit
to all our noisy physics. Wish it up,
I tell myself, there is no paradise
except the one you squander being here,
this lovely now with all this mind in it
your flesh. No paradise but what I make.
Tell that to Oahu and such liberties
where louche midshipmen stumble in Chinese.
As if it all were still about some language
we need to learn, especially the illiterate
who sit there in their departure lounges
with one word after another tight
spider-webbing across their heads.
We are prisoned by the word we do not speak.

2 December 1993

As if to strive over the fallen
ice floes of ordinary feeling numbed
numbered by the daze of your weakness.
Mine. I woke from the hammer blows,
the mattress trolls
pounding their way up to the sun again.

No sun. The sparkle on the stream
is birds. Animal
attire I put on. So be a man, pergrimage
de la vye humaine. Peregrinus so I sing,
lamine the Northern ice,
swallowed up by propaganda. We wake

civilly from underneath. But what's that worth.
when we bend past the low-hung Dr. Pepper sign
by the 7-11 and o Christ that they are bright there,
middle of the empty night of little towns
so bright as if there were people there,
rowboats or mustangs or little princes
in silken rags once dimity lavender and lime.
As if it were a city and we were clean.

But it is little night and hollow isle and mostly sleep.
And what it should be is walking towards
and coursing greatly circles round a central pole
our footsteps rubricating a dust that might be snow.

3 December 1993

Time to say enough said? Not so.
The browning principle that falls the trees
words them with leaf anew anon.
So there you are. I woke up before my head,
was intelligent and had no sense

or sense was something said —I belonged
to what I read— even a lie
—like Dr. Doyle's or Mr. Baudelaire's—
bound me to its truth. And all the while
I felt the sun rose exclusively from within
the special bodies in the neighborscape,
sleek-hipped happeners —not from me,
my body was a darkness and a stone
equivalent of night — elephant's graveyard
where what is spoken wander, sinks and dies
into the silence from which it speaks in me to say.

4 December 1993

CHRISTMAS 1993

If this were the night
and we heard them outside
whining and panting
maybe with the weight

of what she carried
and all the messed-up meanings
of her life, the old
husband, the intractable

animal, would we
let them in? And if we did
what then, what would it mean
to have all that Inconvenience

spilling on our sheets,
leaving stains on our ordinary
affairs? We would have something
to remember but so what?

Don't we have enough to
remember as it is,
and what did memory ever
do for us?

The star looks in the windowglass
and we stare right back.
Hear nothing. Lock the door.
A god is nothing to do with us.

Even a woman is beside the point.
Out there with her man
and her destiny and her animal
disappearing down the road.

4 December 1993

FRIMAIRE

Nothing ever happened in the wintertime.
We hear Prairial and Germinal, Thermidor
and coup-d'état Brumaire. But when the frost
of Frimaire and Nivose's snow come down
a silence walks through the eternal Revolution.
God is born. Charlemagne is crowned. Dante
has a vision he tries to make sense of
by magic numbers and the rule of three.
But nothing happens. The Opera is full,
the lank cafés smolder with seductions,
behind steamed-over windows magazines are born.
And nothing happens. It's all a kind of busy sleep,
this thing of history when people stay indoors
scheming and breeding and the bread smells good
but that is what bread does. Always. And the dog
stupefied with cold investigates the empty street.

5 December 1993

for Charlotte

Those islands of yours give us permission—
Psychiatrists in furs, merchants inventing
Ironwork clocks and steeples to put them in,
To preside like the Mint Tower in Amsterdam
Over the strange intercourse of the living and the dead
We call money. This hand of mine
Could be an island too. I look down now
Not sure if I have written “give us permission,”
Or “no permission,” and I hear the throaty
Bong of just those bells as slice the hours
Even into arguments and dinners and goodnight.
Have you ever caught the exact tone
(Toll) of the day’s last sounding? This
Hand means to be a bell, mark music, cut bread,
Touch and be consoled. But is it mine, bone,
Any more than an island is? “We are permitted”
Or there is no permission? And the sea, did the sea
Have nothing to do with it? *An island*
We lived on, and a smaller island we saw, just saw,
Low along horizon — and that was something
To think about, the distances, the boats, the loss.
Everything we see is loss. Yet absence *lasts*.

6 December 1993

THE EMBROCATION

Finding that little point, the distraught
pharmacist annuls his chemistry—
powder of sleep, a dram of consequences.
Touch me it said over his place of business
but few did. So few. And those passing in canoes
down the touristy little stream in birch woods
thought the sign some hickish pleasantries,
a plea for what no one really wants.
The window curtain moves, the wall
across the way is full of sunny brickwork
and the parrot after ninety-seven years is dead.
Go, he thought, into the savage bookstore
where I learned such alchemy, turned stars
to dew and the dew to something oily—
always oil!— to besiege the quiet city of
your differences with a kind of mousy war.
We live by skin, he said again, and thought
of leprosy, cures for eczema, lily ponds,
Sunday morning, all he ever wanted walking
out of arms' reach down the sunny side to church.
Newspapers come downwind with a sound of fire
in his messy bedroom grate. Apple wood,
seasoned answers. He thought of everything
because nothing had to be said. Fish
swam around in his head. How alone
a body is in the world. He supposes for an hour
crime is an answer to loneliness. *I know the bird
is dead— I want to know what the bird knows
now*. Then quick in empty terror he thinks he knows.

7 December 1993

to Gerrit

The “amplitudes”

again, come back to that
this again,

fields of Saxony where the ice flowers
snarl skate-tips of teen *Wesen*,

beings - creatures - existents,
reading as they go
the long shastra written in the wind language
Mitochondria of the Late Romantic Bipeds

we get to be so wonderful,

how
we are. So cute.

I wanted to tell you this
because Holland, we were on a fine
empty train, compartment to ourselves,
ourselves and chocolate and sturdy seven-grain
five-day-old bread from the health
food store on Beer Street in Osnabrück,
and thought of you,

Dutch you,
and the sober sluices of Amsterdam
we were headed for,
and a swan glimmering at dawn
outside our window on
the Gentlemen's Canal.

These are notes for it, friend, ice crystal
to make some Yeatsy pattern on the windowpane,
not able to say much more than pictures could,
this murky postcard from last week.

8 December 1993

Thursday morning a piece of bread
the vitality
of this knowledge amazes me

the taste inside the taste
some buried here
I have to bring to light

my father's bones showing through my skin
I come home to a piece of bread.
What is buried

a word inside a word
a kiss inside a mouth o Christ
still talking about kisses

when the sky is leather
and the goblin comes
skating up the insolent canals

I though were my own blood
in my own body,
wait, it is a taste

of rice inside wheat and rain
inside rice. I have been there
puddles on the path through bamboo

had sky in them
a beetle crawled at my feet insisting
Come home almost everything is forgiven.

9 December 1993

Coal heavers, and I meant it,
a kind of love you learn on scows
moored too long in the canal
and even the mildewy tarpaulin
is a gentle place a lawn for you
and sky knows all of you, in peace.
You never looked below the canvas
but something was soft there and smelled good.
One day you saw a rat on a rooftop
and the girl laughed at you for being afraid—
a rat in the sky can't hurt us.
But it wasn't, it was between the sky and you
and in-between is where things mean.
And are they mean things? Does an animal
by meaning something mean it at us?
But she pressed my face against her, and I was still.

10 December 1993

Remembering that one of the things a man can do is walk around
or sit at a window staring into the mist
from this ship of a house bound to the surest
destination I am happy. Noticing which
is the only annoyance in this morning chemistry.
A new dye. The color of now.

11 December 1993
Kagyü Thubten Chöling

Roof rain and water boil.
The frequencies
align. In the cave of hearing
an omnivore
turns everything it eats to feeling.
And again a sound makes me happy—
defeated by joy I listen to rain.

Names. Understanding
I have nothing but what I do.

11 December 1993
Kagyü Thubten Chöling

A gold thread looped around a thought
then lost in several
and no cat waits to tease it yarn-wise out

what we call thinking
is a road we see
one midnight glimpse of when the lightning shows.

11 December 1993
Kagyü Thubten Chöling

The words we think with
A brave song we hum
As we go along in the dark.

11 December 1993
Kagyü Thubten Chöling

LET THE WORDS FIND THEIR OWN WAY IN
THE DARK

O mist (a mist)
some bare
trees walk in now

enough light now
for me to say

what I don't see.

Notebook God!
Foreigner in every sphære,
observe. *The house has now come closer to the trees.*

Some days ships come to land.
A drum is beating,
turbines in the sky. Upstairs,
where the people are.

And what is this, all this, a calm cure
for silence? Bakery manners,
morning waiting for its proper birds.

11 December 1993
Kagyü Thubten Chöling

Sometimes to forget anything is here.
Stare into the weather
a local sentence
formed for my sake out of silence
to caress me
with ambiguous communication:
a world.
The 'decaying base.' The ambiguation.

11 December 1993

I don't have to be somebody else.
Certainly I don't have to be the one called "me."

So much light has poured now in the mist
I am full of specious certainties.

Faintly I remember Amsterdam, Jacques Roubaud,
Joe Carter's home run. I wish Charlotte were with me
to share the prance of light

faintly through all things, the mist. And get my wish.
She comes in as I'm lighting the fire.
And when we come to the window the river's to be seen.

11 December 1993
Kagyü Thubten Chöling

The day changes. One gull
one river.
We wake late.

Sleep through the frontiers of eastern states,
whereas go to sleep in Montana wake in Montana
the train still singing
along one-sixth of the Canada-U.S. border: Montana

oro y plata. Spanish not fabled. Why do I care
where Manitoba is, and yet I do,
to reach beyond that scholarship whose basic rule
in family convenience: field work (mind and body)
must be compatible with basketball and PTA.

Whereas. Whereas what? What are you drearing at now,
Robertus? (Fact, my first first name.) An order
of Castalian devotees out of Jünger or Hesse
intent on the Total Inscription of Newly Known
Ever-enlarging Reality's domain inside some book.

Tinkers. I grumble
to make these glorious travellers arrive.
Tinkers who homeless and relaxed
travel in a word on wheels, they move, they wake
up unabashed before the sky, a silver moon
crosses their paths, they move ever
in search of knowables.
But where wheels won't?

Will they too
stay away
and what is to be known
never reach the knowers?

With such nonsense I find myself reproaching
nice men and women who know Greek.
Envy. Gnashing of teeth. Surely (though)
there is another way to know.

12 December 1993
Kagyü Thubten Chöling

This is nothing worth saying.
(Learn a language.)
A duck is.

12 December 1993
Kagyü Thubten Chöling