

11-1992

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## LETTER TO THE PAGANS OF MOMOSTENANGO

One part is preserved from the first time  
One part is rescued from the bad time when the friars came  
One part is now and always

                    always the face of this day  
this one, the only  
one that is true.

Now here is the problem:  
what modern people mean by paganism  
is a flabby promiscuous thing.  
Promiscuity is flabby,

whereas you are exact, comrades, exact  
in your visits to the mountains,

*the exact places*

and if we get those wrong  
we will get everything wrong  
inside us  
and we will not know

the rivers of fire and sanity and help  
inside us will not flow  
and we will not know.

You are exact  
in your places and your times,  
the Day is a place  
and is one, the Day

is the only one of itself,

the Day is exact as a mountain  
and in place,  
a Day is in place  
and if we don't know its mansion  
there is nothing that we know.

What we thought we meant by pagan  
was a sad self-indulgent moody selfish liberal thing  
it meant to be promiscuous and weak

it meant to complain about everything  
and take no responsibility  
and blame everything on some god  
and hate some god we say doesn't exist

what we meant in America when we wanted to be pagans  
was a sad empty fitful thing

doing whatever came into anybody's head  
and blaming anybody in our path

a weak stilted angry restless uncaressing thing  
no vine no root no car no moon no cow.

The age of the promiscuous is dead  
the gods of the earth warn us

only a new paganism can help now  
only the focused accurate act will help  
only the faithful focused act  
will satisfy

will satisfy the virgin and her groom  
will satisfy the heart of sky.

You know this, pagans of Momostenango,  
you with your candles of Petrofina paraffin  
and your natural copal resin incense  
weeping into the smoke the Earth likes to smell

the rational resins and the limitless fire  
dances on your stubby white candles

the age of doing careless is dead  
and dead are those who lost the craft of care,

you are accurate, pagans of Momostenango  
and we have something to learn from your way

you keep one day separate from any other  
until (and it may be a simple thing after all  
made of remembering and paying attention and love)  
we know the right address of every mountain

and know the places inside us  
like people of sticks and sunrise and being at home.

10 November 1992

BECAUSE OF THE PECULIAR TREES

Crow forgive me, I thought it was some sleep!

It was a newborn snowfall  
hurrying to earth.

Message from the Cloud  
I every see!

I knead the dough among my hands  
I semaphore for light

a celebrant and what she needs.

11 November 1992

## CULTURE

Camille Claudel  
didn't die until 1943  
a year after the Vel d'Hiv roundup

so as she lay in the asylum  
dreaming of the smooth musculature  
she more than anyone at all

could find in horn and alabaster and bone  
the Jews of Bobigny were creeping  
terrified to their French beds.

11 November 1992

## THE INFORMATION

Charlotte says:  
in Rossetti's Annunciation  
the feet of the Angel  
are painted from life.

His friend  
posed for the angel  
his sister for Maria.  
The flames at his feet  
are drawn from life.

11 November 1992  
[a note from London]

MASS IN TIME OF PLAGUE: *Grünewald's Altarpiece*

1.

The image of the Crucified  
for all its green horror

appeals to the broken hearted  
the damaged mind of our days

we see the twisted tendons, the ill-joined  
mannequin a drunken carpenter

stuck up on a hillside as his mark.  
This is what happened to a man.

2.

We see brown leaves and don't concern ourselves—  
any summer that might be dying will come again

we see brown leaves and celebrate driest beauty  
the witty wind in all its fitfulness

the arbitrary, being momentary, gorgeousness of cloud.  
We see the one blow away the other,

the common transiency of order and of mess.

11 November 1992

## WRIST

1.

Wrist to turn the doorknob cluster  
 of writhing Sanhedrin arguments  
 to repel a civilized invader  
 problem of a supra-ordinate society  
 whose language we Jews speak every day  
 but they got it from higher people  
 they also conquered

the sword's

the simplest dialect

for conquest

is a mutual thing a marriage bed  
 no one rises from unfucked  
 the place or land itself that counterpane  
 guest house from which the ghost sets out  
 smooth motel for all our whilings

2.

writhings from which new war's begotten  
 victor smeared with oily henna of the beaten  
 war is the chreode of public sexuality—  
 invasion the metatype of intercourse — we  
 suffer and in our millions perish — cells  
 in the immune — encounter between  
 two vast sexual bodies our nations  
 corollary — promiscuous nations peaceful  
 in the relative — repressed sail out to war  
 — Bataille erroneous — *war* is coitus  
 not crime — crime is only a forgetting  
 — you must hate before you hurt —  
 whereas a soldier lover hurts kills from love  
 —errant surgeons blunder in their wake —  
 so I have borne my song of public dying

3.

I hope my knowing know nothing but the year  
 as long as we think war is fright and anger

we will never understand it — war is sexist and desire  
swollen out of the smarmy horrid dreams of millions  
*we are not the warriors* — a government  
doesn't go to war a government is led along  
by ovaries and testicles and made to fight  
the government is bridegroom at the door of the bride  
the bride is a government also longing dark  
in secret urgency to be deflowered — a war  
is not about men and women — a war  
is a landscape rising and besieging other places  
with throbbing violet roses of remorseful desire  
overswarming life like dodder and ivy and dock.

12 November 1992

## HOMAGE TO TIEPOLO

What is turning is a joint inside the sky—  
Hobbema for example or even Canaletto  
knows enough of that *release* Gian Tiepolo  
made his special (hence our) own.  
They come from the ends of the earth  
to cover us with their painless structure  
underlit by glory. The backyard of God.  
All Italy must have waited for the morning  
to check the light against his painted norm.  
Go inside the church to see the sky—  
light itself comes from between them and the earth  
shimmering innuendoes of immortality—  
a child unpacks his body as the world outside.  
He alone knows how close we are to cloud.

13 November 1992



## WANTING TO WRITE AS SIMPLE AS I CAN

*for Charlotte*

Would the kings of Edom understand this?  
Who were they?  
They were a conversation I was having with the earth  
before the sky answered

or one part of it, the yellow one  
that came and went and promised  
it would come again and always did  
but nothing changed for all that,

nothing changed. They were the kings  
who understood the intricate simplicity of things,  
the feel of a woman's arm or the smooth  
slippery underskin of onions—

and I don't want the voice of what I say  
to be smaller tighter than my voice saying it.  
And who are you? I am the man who talks  
and Edomite kings look at me from their thrones

fascinated by the boredom of always  
and always having something to say. How much  
a king wants to just listen! That is why  
they pay me so well and reward me with winters.

And I stay. They look at me disguised as trees  
and rivers and rocks, I talk to them  
as if they were a company of exalted women  
patient of my company. But they are not women,

only you are women. Only you are the earth.

14 November 1992

## ONE FOR THE DAYKEEPERS

*for Charlotte*

Saying the different names of time  
pleases me like flags

no flag without its kingdom come or gone  
or on its way unlikely ever

no day without its paycheck and its sun  
wait, I look around the room

"Moist & Natural" says the bread  
"Front Rear Rear Front" are where the blue flames

and the heater calls out Q U A R T Z  
letters spread out like geese on a corn field

inheritors of stob, wait,  
my knees hurt from yesterday's meditation

old men like to watch grandchildren play  
from the diffident Olympus of their hearing-aids<sup>1</sup>

and what do I propose to watch  
stealthy childless and magniloquent?

I compose my memoirs in the peace of feeling  
(what is that supposed to mean?)

I shave I shower I look upon the calendar  
as if a window onto maiden meadows

and I the king of knights too skilled to tourney  
resting sore ankles on my comfy dog

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<sup>1</sup>(an Audenish clench, disdain, disdain)

and I see the names of time: Gorffennaf,  
Hydref and (here we are) Tachwedd

staring into the blasted frost-woods of Rhagfyr  
I've heard you mumble them in bed

or roll them juicy in your sacred mouth  
laughing at the sounds we set to time

as if its nervous hurried quivering line  
were our only music —

peace, it is morning, that old word  
—*morrowing*, where tomorrow becomes today

the light comes on, the crows soar off to work,  
Violetta rises from the stage and come to life

in all the imaginary tragedy of our poor  
miraculous actual lives. All you need

is time to see it (hear) all you need is time  
the single sky behind the million flags.

15 November 1992

## MORNING CHORALE

Don't know the word for what it  
Doesn't know the bare leaves  
Of what I don't mean it doesn't mean  
A perfect consanguinity of ignorance.

16 November 1992

## THE OBSERVER

The Pyramid is open now, the world  
 Of trumpets answers the world of murk  
 And congressmen come forth in linen aprons,  
 Neat bald men with innocent polish skulls  
 Waxy in candlelight. Blossoms swoon in the dark.

(A satyr peeks in through a wattle screen  
 To see what religion means.) Flapping loud  
 Of considerable wings — the sacred vultures  
 Of the Indoor Mountain call half-loud  
 In the experimental way that hungry artists use  
 To feast one more time on a dead society.

The gilded pistol grip of the pharaoh holds  
 Secure enough the Ivory Scepter of the Morning,  
 Tax gatherers mew in the shadows of his throne.  
 (A satyr tries to study religion — where are the women?)  
 O this religion is a masculine thing, a game boys play,  
 Their mothers and their consorts let them, only  
 The birds are female in his place, the lofty  
 Womby vultures that the air itself inseminates  
 With a quiet meaning no dogma will degrade.

(Why do they do it? is what the satyr thinks,  
 Why don't they stroke my flanks and I stroke theirs  
 And pass the night in pleasant reverie  
 Using every brain-cell of the skin?) Flowers  
 Spring open at the high priest's persuasion,  
 Everyone marvels at the sudden gladiolus  
 Purply tremulous in the same fitful current  
 That makes the lamp flames pucker. (Kiss me,  
 The satyr wishes, What is religion if it makes men old,  
 Me old?) The congressmen applaud and whimper

Happy because the dawn is coming and each  
Will read his name fresh re-inscribed  
On alabaster tablets by the Court House steps  
(The satyr's fingers grip the wattles in his old despair,  
No one loves the world enough to touch it,  
Touch me, his furry thighs are itchy, palms hurt,  
An old centurion of sorts looks over at the scratch).

Strong Nubians with elegant quiet minds begin  
To crank the windlass, great creaking noises, wind  
Whiffling, jackal snort, cheetah cough, hawk whistle,  
The Mountain is opening to the holy ordinary light  
And the ruling classes shuffle back to work.  
(Alone on the mountainside the satyr fervently kisses  
Forgivingly the smooth back of his empty hand.)

16 November 1992

## AFTER THE WORLD

*Email* enamel antiques orchestra  
of robots in the museum Aux Gets  
for mechanical music. Visitors  
crowd in the pale air. But here  
"it's Eileen's waffle," the banana-scent  
that began artificial perfumery.  
Aroma of the wise. The amyl hope.  
I made this tree, you Sentimentalist,  
no demiurge to interpose  
in your pedestrian philosophy. I lift  
my roots into the air, the birds  
can calculate my distance from despair,  
the sun is my least fruit. I am mall,  
market, environment, peace and war,  
I am your all. Reflect on juripraxis  
and love me, relent your saber edges,  
I am the meaningful frontier.  
Inside me every country's safe,  
warmed by my fine fire. Out there  
a man with no teeth has a toothache  
and the old moon drowns in the Aral Sea.

16/17 November 1992

## A CASE OF CONSCIENCE

*for Charlotte*

Not a word I like to use not a thing  
I like to see who am I I am Stentorgast  
a ruly kindness at the back of your mind

that breathes hard in your head and heart  
when you see say an animal killed.  
I think the pressure behind your eyes

when you watch the killed doe bleed into snow.  
You know it is wrong to know what they tell you.  
You know it is wrong to walk the way they do.

17 November 1992

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*for Charlotte*

Let us hope this is what Charlotte wants  
because there is nothing  
nothing more certain to be needed  
than that curious absolute we call a "word."  
We find it all by itself  
alone  
in very large books.

17 November 1992

