Robert Kelly Manuscripts

9-2020

sep2020

Robert Kelly

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THERE WAS A WORD

beginning with the letter L
i meant to say
but then I fell asleep.
The pillow knows it
but it’s still asleep,

it’s not a fierce word
like lion, or a lewd word
like luxurious, or frightening
like a leopard coughing
too near you in the jungle
(remember India?),

no,

it was a a mild word
like ledger or letter,
not even stern like
legal or legitimate.

Something on the short
side, two syllables
maybe, accurate but quiet,
leading the story on,
beginning it really,
like a flower
left on the table,
who could have left it,
what does it mean,
lily, lover, lavender?

1 September 2020
Lend me your mind
for just a few minutes,
I’ll lick it clean
before I give it back.

That’s what the ads say,
the ads they call songs
on the radio, Believe me,
silence does it better.

Or is all art an ad for itself?

1 September 2020
Soft day
teach me something.
Pearl sky,
remind me
there is yielding
to be done,
letting, letting go.

And dear trees,
some of you know
how hard it is
to be green all year round,
tell me how

or at least teach
long peaceful sleep
where I can dream
what flowers when I wake.

Grey sky
full of the softest light
settles around us
like a the prayer
of a child
who has been praying
from the beginning

1 September 2020
HOLY INFERENCES

The streets are wet outside and I heard rain-- I’m being logical again, not always a safe call. Sage move. The streets are open about what happens and give clear hints of where they go. But nothing of the past. Who knows where anything comes from? This rain I infer from heaven as they used to call the sky with a logic of their own.

2.
And who were they? Ancestors clearly but how to prove it? All the noble DNA analyses
tell us more or less
where someonebodies
lived or went or came from
on a long trail of maybes.
But never who? So
who are they anyway
who made us who we are?

3.
Does it matter,
as the street would say.

Here we are, and we
are mysterious enough.

Which of us has looked
asked Thomas Wolfe
into his brother’s heart.

And I don’t even a brother,
if you know what I mean.
Just an endless series of I and you covering the planet

with colza beans and Cadillacs as nobody used to say.

4. Which leaves the streets wet and the sky far away as usual. I was going to say that in French but it would sound snarky or show-offy, just like me, comme d’jabitude.

5. You can tell I’m struggling with anxiety, a whole brain full of what its tenant doesn’t want to think about.
Anxiety silences desire, 
shrivels perception, cancels 
meaningful speculation 
about astronomy and history.

When smart poets are anxious 
they keep quiet. Why don’t I 
just go for a walk. Rain 
never hurt anyone, did it? 
Then I think of poor Chausson 
dead in a bike crash— 
what was the weather like 
that day, and was he singing?

6.
The thing to do 
is not say I today--
then there will be no one 
to interfere with the song. 
And it all be song and sense and you.

2 September 2020
REVISION

Leave everything out.
What’s left is true.

2.IX>20
School starts.
The mind dries
up outward
to the other,

can’t hear
itself think
it talks so much.

Blank paper,
blank paper
save me again,
teach me to sing
what I can’t hear,

blank paper,
blank paper
it all comes from you.

2 September 2020
A SHIP SUPPOSED

Suppose a ship.  
Not necessarily that 
trim craft  Dante  
with some of us boy poet 
friends set out 
upon the slender sea 
in quest of the magic island 
where the Word grows,  
haunted by a hungry Muse, 

suppose a ship, doesn’t have 
to be a liner nosing through ice floes  
or an ironclad scared of torpedoes,  
a ship we have to suppose,  
not even a Norwegian freighter  
.o that deep blue flag in new light  
lipping at dawn up the Narrows  
between Brooklyn and Staten Island,  
between where I lived and where I worked,
suppose a ship, of course
not a cruise ship
pretending to be a city
or an aircraft carrier
pretending to be an island,
suppose a ship, no authentic
caravel carrying Aztec gold to Spain,

be patient with me, suppose
a ship. not a ferryboat
across the Bosporus, not a skiff
on the Baltic, bright-haired
warriors scudding towards
one more battle,

suppose a ship
instead as calm as the sea
it proposes to ride, suppose
a ship empty, sails furled
neatly, resting at the shore
peaceful as a sleeping nun,

suppose we make our way
down the sands and climb on board,
suppose the inscrutable crew casts off so we drift
slowly enough almost across the current as the wind picks up, no sails up yet,
we wonder about that, the wood of the deck is fresh and clean, the taffrail polished and smooth,
is it leather maybe? hide pf sp,e ancient beast still soft?

above us they’re unmuzzling the sails, suppose we feel for the first time, maybe the first time ever, what the sea ks saying to our feet, subtle sway of limbs, balance, suppose its word seeps up into us, reaches the shallows of loins and heart and mind,

the ship is moving steady now, the sails boisterous, loud creak of wood, noisy boot-steps of the unseen crew
doing whatever it is they do

and we go! Suppose we go
and keep going
as long as the sea
keeps talking,
and is there ever
night on this ocean?

suppose there are cabins down below
or bunk beds or hammocks.
suppose we can sail
all day and into the dark
then sleep easy into day again
and go along wittingly with
whatever the sea was saying,
saying even now,
suppose the ship
is underneath us now
and we have sailed
all the way to today,
storm-free, the horizon clear.

3 September 2020
Prometheus taught us metal to smelt and forge and vast.
But who taught us to make glass, that sacred, almost blasphemous clarity from which we drunk and in which we see ourselves and all the world through it and it saves us from the wind?

3 September 2020
AGRESTIS

Of the earth,
the field.,
the known place.
The known.
Walk over to the word
and take its hand,
it squeezes back,
you hear it
halfway to your heart.
That is what it means
‘to mean,’
to be in the middle
of something and know
where you are.

2.
The sky looks sunshine
the trees look rain.
And now the trees light up--
surrealism never lasts,
the farmer leans
again on his shovel,
the dirt pretends to part--
the natural politeness of physics
can be counted on
but not too far.

3.
So I wonder
like everyone before me
whose breath
is the wind?
The question
does not get old,
the answer
shimmies ever
off through the trees,
‘trees’ hear meaning
whatever we see
as we go on breathing.
Asking. Digging.
4.
There is a big field not far from here where you can stand and see almost to the horizon on all sides. Nowadays you have to stand up to your shoulders in corn buty still. Horizons in a land of forests! Come with me, help me to see so we can look all ways at once, maybe finally get a sense lof what a field really is, coaxing the light down.

4 September 2020
NO-WARD WORD

still leads in
by turn.

The torque
is all that matters
still.

And there we,
awkward and solemn
as somebody
else’s grandparents
in an old snapshot--
how have we come
to such a place
baffling as a dream?
Again, the word
brought us here,
the word unspoken
slept with the one we spoke.
No we. I mean me.
DOn’t let me get
away with generalities
as if I spoke for all humans.
I speak for all beings.
2.
As I said or was saying
i got said. Miracles
still happen, the ship
did not sink, the ship we’re on
we think of as a chubby planet
actually is a slim
frigate sailing through space.
As I was saying, I was said.
I was sent to wander
through fancy very expensive
old department stores,
boutiques big as cathedrals,
my task in that grey-green
fin-de-siècle dingy light
was no more than to discover
an exit, a way out to the street.
But everything was indoors
in that dream. Bathrooms
hard to find, the elevator tiny
but the people smiled.
The last to get on was a small
Japanese--I liked his grey sweater.
3.
Sometimes it’s enough
to close a door to be there.
When you come into that room
the first thing you notice
is the flowers--
blue hydrangeas
in a clear glass bowl
so it must be summer
and the sea not far.
Those flowers make the room
a garden--sit down and be at peace
they seem to say. But then
you look around and see
the furniture of a demanding life,
desk, table, bookcase, TV.
What manner of creature
you wonder lives here,
plagued with images,
praying to the decent flowers?
4.
Do you remember
the first time
you lived on earth?
And what about
the time before?
So vague, so vague,
like the name
of someone you thought
or thought you loved
once and all
you can bring to mind
is a little ruby they wore.
Try harder, the past
is scarier than the present,
yes, I know, but still,
you are the shadow
you cast then, and I,
poor me, am just
the ground on which
your shadow falls.
5.
Words are folklore
nothing more
the scholars claim
but John said otherwise
and I want him to be right
but I want it to be
dfolklore too, the truth
we pass along unconsciously
while we talk about spinach
or taxes or the cool morning,
a word leads nowhere
and everywhere at once
and it is such a joy to follow,
trusting, trusting
the lore, the folk, the God
the word was that spoke us
and we spoke. All
of this is answering.
6. Whorf was excited that the Hopi had no special verbal form to say past action. O thy could tell the present from the past but their verbs did not contain that information. A verb is permanent as an action is. It is true whenever it was or will be. Imagine Whorf in Connecticut thinking about all that, around the same time Wallace Stevens was busy in Hartford too—

o time, time, you mean so much to me and I so little mean to you.

7. Into the trees then, the true, the words they speak that aren’t ours
but we can listen.
Not the lazy listen
we give to bird song
but eager, open-
hearted hearing
reverently available
to what we don’t understand
but does keep talking,
and will until we do,
the other word,
the word that is out.

5 September 2020
I was a different person then
I had a mother
and I was her son

the lights go off and on again
the weather changes
cool tonight for Virgo

and no more needs to be
said about me
whoever I turn out to be.

5 September 2020
Knowing something is going there, being there again.

6 September 2020

lune
ZEBRAS

I saw two zebras fucking
in the zoo of course
I was alone on the path.
The huge male was ramming
her from the rear,
straight on. straight in,
his hooves pounding away
on her poor backbone
and he was roaring
like horses I suppose they are,
the male clambering
to his private heaven
up the bone ladder of her back,
two thousand pounds
of animals making love
as we call it, and not a sign
of how she felt in all this,
the ground trembling
a little beneath us
as I hurried away.

6 September 2020
SMALL SOUNDS

The small sounds of before
no louder than a bird a block away,
the mini-fridge, the breze in leaves.
These quiet voices say Again.

2.
The first thing you notice
about children
is how loud their voices are,
piercing the educated
calm of the ordinary day.
School mutes them, eventually
teaches mumble, buys silence.
silence is best. I was a child once
but it didn’t last. Now hear
my whispering roar.
3.
Culture seems sometimes
built on blame.

   Eve’s temptation,
Prometheus’s presumption,
lots of Latin words for
how bad we are and why
all things we have seem stolen
and money masters mind.
And all these years we race
to put things right.

4.
A stone, any stone can be
a column in front of your house too,
Socrates, to lean on while you think.
that wordless dream
from which sometimes
truth wakes to speak.
5.
The trees of course know better.
They proliferate
and thereby civilize.
We think better in their shade.

6.
I keep trying to figure things out,
cold fingers, Wallace Stevens,
compass on the dashboard,
Bruckner’s Ninth, tomorrow
turns out to be one more today.
I don’t dare close the window.
If I had a fireplace and a fire in it
I’d tear the calendar off the wall
and toss it in. But no calendar.
Just the wall. A wall is good.
Pray to the wall and close my eyes.

7.
And then she woke again
and was the Sun.
The Moon in his sly way
had left her once again.
The planet lay outspread before her, breakfast,
this sumptuous reality.
She smiles now as she feeds us from the sky, we eager trees.

8.
Wait. Go back to Hartford, Whorf and Stevens due east of here, an hour and some over away,

where Charlotte was born, my wife, my life renewed.
And their river too flows both ways, sea slips inland and heals the country silence.

Maybe not so strange they both were businessmen by day, the linguist and the poet--what more could love require
to sing itself into presence and overwhelm the doubt?

I watch my sleeping wife and learn to speak.

6 September 2020
TRANSFIGURATION

The feast of that, more mysterious than miracle-- the day we see things as they are, truly are, beyond our habits of sight.

_Trikaya_, Christ between Moses and Elias, and who were they anyhow, and why did the apostle name them so, the two vision figures on either side of the One they thought they knew?

Teach me to understand, to doubt what I see,
and doubt my doubting.
Ask the stranger
Who are you?
and pray your ears
are clean enough to listen
in case an answer comes.

6 September 2020
ARCHIPELAGO

Express
the moor montage

rufous towhee
on bare branch
over heather

heather

mild you to mean it
dream we live on

dirt under glacier
heather path
to hilltop
either

therefrom
scrutinize the sea
never hurt to
especially now
the wind so
rare from the east

the bird in you
hearkens

hear everything
while it can

speak

whose house
had crushed
seashells the
path to it

suspend judgment

take the winner’s
side for a change

heather
Lent in August
promise no names
have all been spoken

blue pebble
sand all the way
up here

the things they do
rain pool

whose hips
happening the hill

bird scare
fox in heather

heather

mind is where
names are stored

mix them up
as music
on the parapet
a silence

left over
from so many wars

from far
green of
aspen down there

woodcock
in hedge

the bird says

if you miss
the island
you still have the sea.

7 September 2020
Consoling the absence itself
says a man who is always late
always rushing to catch up.
spitting the words out as he
races towards the temple of silence
the goddess who ends the day.
Console the absence
for my presence
he chants,
    console the sun
for my shuttered eyes
turned away,
    console the past
for abandoning it,
left in its tracks back there,
back there,
    console time
for my hurrying
away from any now
into the fantastic obligation,
the must that drags me
as if now is a prison
from which I must escape,
must, must, what a dull
music, a comma
in an endless sentence
lets me breathe a moment,
not too long, and once
to long meant to desire
with all your heart to be
in or with some other
self or sense or citadel
above an all-forgiving sea.
How could I have given
a nice girl *War and Peace*?
Because I think she
was better than that,
a Bad Girl, who did what
she wanted, even if other
people wanted her too

so that many a night
as she lay on her back
and stared at the ceiling
after a meaningless male,
some so-called lover
rolled off and snored away
into his football dreams,

many a night, she’s staring up
and sees what Prince André felt,
or she feels what the Prince saw,
the sky ever opening eternally
and everything changed,
everything is the same,
and everything has meaning,

as he lay on the battlefield
wounded into clarity
so she

    looks up into the beautiful
emptiness and sees
with a sudden thrill
some part of what
everlastingly is seeing her.

7 September 2020
MAGYARS

They came from the other side of the forest

Pan was just one more a stranger they passed by on their way to

the center of the West. He didn’t scare them, they smiled their slim mustachioed smile and passed by, Liszt already on their minds

and their blue river that still flows to us.

7 September 2020
And then it didn’t speak.

No wonder. The hedges were too close, the mulberry in the middle was listening again.

I am only a child, I explained, smart or my age but still young, I’m only trying to understand.

Still no answer. The stone lion on his brick pedestal was still asleep, no hope there, but I rubbed his rough back anyway. I tried again:

I know you’re far away but we can see each other well, you are blue and I am me, please tell me what to do.
At least you’re asking,
a passing blackbird said,
the right question.
And the little turtle I’d seen
under the hedge remarked,
slow and solemn: If
you know the right question
you must know the right answer.
And that was all the help
I got that day; it was enough.
Some years later, just in time
I got an answer from the sky.

8 September 2020
The next port of call
will be tomorrow,
small city, busy waterside.
The immigrants swim ashore,
the rest of us wait, passports
in hand disguised as money.
I think the dollars here are blue and pink,
we’ll see if they work.
Doesn’t matter if I can’t
this time go ashore--
seagulls are what I like best
about the shore, and they,
large and loud and pale
come out to visit us--
who needs the ground?

8 September 2020
Pale sky,  
my favorite why,  

loud road  
stepmother  
of my morning  

a feather  
you brought home  
to know  
a bird by  

or anything  
by what it leaves  
when it’s gone  

identify  
the real  
time, no  
clock knows that.

8 September 2020
A knife is the first worst thing of all, it taught us how to kill and be carnivores, it taught us war.

8.IX.20
Somewhere what I said is safe.

The leaves listened and the wind translated.

A pine cone falls.

8.IX.20

*Kar sem izrekel, je nekje na varnem.*

*Listje je poslušalo, veter je prevedel.*

*Storž pade.*

Slovenian tr. by Vesna
NOCTURNE

She lay there
on her back
almost alone,
studied the empty ceiling
each paint peel,
every crack in plaster
like a star
in that sky

she thought of the sky
outside
the empty sky
fullof stars

like the page in a book,
empty, empty,
just all the words on it
scattering in pale
emptiness

sleep was not far.

8 September 2020
Not need—
a seed
of something else.

2.
Hear the organ?
Synagogues have them too,
pleasure
creeps in everywhere:
the seed we mean.

3.
It’s not enough
to enjoy the weather,
you have to invest it too
building a bankroll of sensation
itself, pure, never
mind your handkerchief.
4. Seeds,
everything a seed
of something else,
to come or having been,
we give birth to the past.

5. And that is the terror of need,
this rosary of lotus seeds
on which we count our prayers.

6. And always more
than we need
and never enough.

9 September 2020
Allowing for revision
the Mayan calendar
says rain. It’s often right--
experience keeping abreast
of the ancient word.
Pleasant when Woden
smiles on Wednesday
even if few of us care
ever even dare to look.

9 September 2020
ALBORADA

She woke
and the ceiling was still there

se didn’t dream
or iff she did
it stayed with her now

soft as he sky
she thought
and thought
we have to teach
the day how to be

then she got up
to check on the sky
banished the curtains
and looked,

everything was there
again, at least
she didn’t notice anything missing
but then we never do
until we do
and then it’s gone

be good to me
today
she prayed
not sure to whom

she went outside
and suddenly felt
the emptiness of the room
she had just left

all that space
behind her
warmth of sleep
pageantry of dream

nothing there
her old air.

9 September 2020
TUNNEL

From a six mile tunnel under the mountains it happened to the wide open plain. The trees skipped the way they do to dodge the hurtling machines. For a lovely morning moment everything was just as it is.

2.
She remembered that from her place on the balcony you could see only a little of her through the lattice under the poppies (Eschscholzia californica), boxes of cereals on the ledge peace offerings to the birds. She was busily remembering a whole other continent sometimes it’s amazing to think one is actually here. When two white-throated sparrows (o how sad their song can be!) flew away she went back to her book.
3.
Back in France the trees calmed down, the road had the look of noontime, empty, everywhere somewhere else. How small we animals really are compared to what is actually there--you could feel the quiet sun hinting gently something like that, o so many reminders needed and every step a road of its own.

4,
When the rain began she shook the first drops off the page she had forgotten to keep reading, she hurried inside and left the flowers to the rain, such things need such things. She shook her hair dry and went to the fridge where the past was stored mostly in glass--nobody trusts plastic anymore.
I really was there once, 
she thinks, I really saw  
the tunnel end and the world  
come back the way it should always be,  
just there, calm, leaving it  
to me to do all the being,  
moving around. Nothing  
caught her fancy in the cold.  
She shut the door--better  
to go hungry than blunt  
the keen arrow of human appetite  
by eating something not desired  
just because it’s there.  
She wishes it would stop raining  
so she could go sparrowing again.

5.  
Less done less to regret  
she remembered an old nun  
saying that, Outside  
a car went by hooting its  
boy noise out its windows  
never mind the rain.
Never mind, those things pass by. She watched the wall, aware that it was telling her a little bit about what she didn’t want to think about--one more reminder!

OK, Wall, what happened in France?

You loved everything you saw but wanted something else. It cost so much just to get here where you began, just to see me again, your brand-new wall that knows all the secrets of every room you ever lived in, what one wall knows, another can repeat--that is the fact of walls that humans build, one wall knows all.
6.
That’s all about you
she cried almost angry
at the plaster, but
what about me?

Are you so different
from me? said the wall,
don’t you know you are
everywhere you have ever been,
that tunnel under the Vosges
debouches I think the word is
right into your living room,
right here, city, actual. holy, blessed.

O wall I’m sorry
I know you mean well,
or mean wall,
whichever is truer, better,
but what am I after,
why does the book end
and leave me here alone,
where do sparrows go
when they don’t see me?
I pray for you, said the wall, because I only know what you know, I am your wall, plus all walls, when they first built walls ten thousand years ago in Turkey they said their own prayers so that all walls should be a little bit like gods, holding and protecting and even remembering-- but no more. A wall doesn’t know the future-- if it did it could not stand. But I can pray, and do, and keep the thieves away.

7. But maybe she wanted the thief, it takes a thief to show you the worth of what you have.
What they want to steal
is where I should begin
she thought. The rain stopped,
so did a bus at the corner,
she went onto the balcony,

there is clarity
even in not knowing,
knowing, knowing,
the sparrow said.
Maybe just trying to know
is a kind of knowing
and maybe knowing is enough.

10 September 2020
EMPYREAN

from which one falls
back to the practiced earth
as a sleeper
wakes into the grain of day.

2.
The tiger walks around the house at night,
stops at the doorway and looks in
to watch the peaceful sleepers breathe--
how sweet the breath of humans is
when they sleep! Sugar of dream,
oil of darkness, horizontal innocence--
he is content, turns and pads away
down the hallway no one knows.

3.
These things will happen us
until we rouse.
And even then the night
is full of plebiscites and fall elections
the day must bear to love with,
find your way home,
finish the food on your plate
if you can find it. And so on.
The dream broke like an egg
and you fell out--
that's what the doctor told me
when I asked was I OK.
Daytime is dangerous
I think she meant, the sun
sees everything and remembers.

4.
Away with wee fears,
the everlasting fire
the sky catches its light from
sustains the toad
or whatever kind of creature
you think you are.
Fear is good for you,
you notice more and jabber less,
lie in the lap of the biggest fear
and suddenly there is nothing there at all, just you at peace in the blue sky, shapely clouds here and there, all the answers everywhere, ready for your questions.

5.
The sermon ended, I looked around to see what would-be god had spoken so, I saw my own shadow on the rock, a rock I didn’t know was there, a world simple with surprises.

6.
In the old days they thought the sun was a sweet tear drop from a ring of holy fire around everything that exists. They thought the mind could find its way
disguised as soul
out to the limits of that fire
and know itself suddenly
part of what it beheld.

7.
The women and men who had
gone there and come back
did not have much to say.
Go, see for yourselves--
that seemed to sum up their report,
Go, be a soul and travel,
slip through the cage of the actual,
be a new being and come back.
How long will it take, we used to ask--
Between one breath and the next
you can go there and live there
and grow old there and come home.

11 September 2020
Think of me as the piano tuner
come to get your instrument
in perfect tone by giving
endless little irritating
twists and jabs. You call
them criticisms, I call them
getting the music right.

11.IX.20
They looked like strangers so we called them friends, had them sit down, fed them milk and blueberry bread, no meat yet, not sure what their religion. And they ate. They called the bread muffins and the little fruit inside they called huckleberries so we knew we had nothing to fear.

2.
She kept looking back as she ran ahead, made sure we were following and we were, though she’d stop sometimes so we slower could come close to catching up with her, then she’d run on and we’d follow. We follow.
Every now and then
she gives us a breather
and then again run on, o
that look on her face
as she looks back over her
right shoulder and runs on.

3.
And so it’s never clear
if we are the guests or the hosts.
Food changes hands. People
run and stop. We go indoors,
we settle on sofas, a phone rings
and we’re off again, she looks back
to make sure we follow.
What would happen if we didn’t,
if we just stood still,
or sat there on the couch,
nibbling, parsing the shadows?
4.
I feel ashamed for even asking. 
She is to be followed. 
They are to be fed. 
Somehow it coheres 
and we are where we are 
at any given moment home. 
This is not wisdom, 
this is fact. Now calculate 
the distance between. 
She’s looking back at us again, 
I could almost swear she’s smiling.

12 September 2020
What does a tree
think of grammar?
Grammar is our grain
I guess, subjective,
objective, genitive,
ablative, conditional.
future perfect, past.
The tree knows all that
in one moment, one
glimpse of bare wood
tells more than books could,
And there is a winter
in language too,
when the leaves fall away
but the meaning stays.

12 September 2020
Sometimes one sees the same,
a long line divided mind
two directions of the (always) heart.

The merit of melody,
the shimmer of—
truth is always a reflection,
cathedral upside-down in running stream
it’s so quiet you can hear the air—
but science tells us that air’s the only thing we ever hear.

12 September 2020
listening to Alvin Singleton
If ever it told me the truth
a green leaf
a month from now
will be yellow or tan or brown
or red,
    time is full of colors.

2.
We say: this too
is a messenger.
Or the message itself—
how can we decide?

Carpet the truth with lies—
protect it from
the scuffmarks of easy passage,
praying with your mind on something else.

12 September 2020
listening to Adolphus Hailstork
Sometimes there is something left to say.

A gilt tower over inland waterway—

where I come from everything pretended to be sea.
And Ocean am.

12 September 2020
ROOMS

The rooms that enter us and stay.

We know the doors of them polished by dream, the sunlight or the shallows in each room, bedspread table Monet print on the wall, the old-fashioned telephone, the empty vase.

Springtime seldom comes, no one speaks Latin, the bathroom always far away.

Facts torture with images. Room after room.
2.
And sure enough
when you wake up
you’re in yet another,

and this room too,
mainland or island,
Anglophone or otherwise,
will play its role
in some night opera
from which you can barely
awaken, like now,
into the freshness of the familiar.

3.
Nothing leaves us.
There is nowhere
for it to go. no border
it can cross to flee
the immensity of here.
4.
Warm sticky danish coffee in a paper cup and late to work.
The Apollo gallery in the Louvre. Melville’s writing desk, dentist’s office, closet on Brown Street with the black seal fur soft inside it.

There is no distance. And difference is only a taste on the tongue, and that too soon fades.
BOY ON HOLIDAY

Outside the breeze
makes tree leaves
dance wild shadows
of your future wife.

You can learn almost
everything from them,
the moves, the play
of light and shade.

You have come here
for this, your rite
of ;passage from artifice
to actual.

She dances
for you, all of them do.

13 September 2020
The speakable breeze
discovers a way in—
release is a species of migration,
the tribes lumbering out of Siberia
into the civilization of your breath.

Wake up. The day needs you,
who knows why?
You have come
from so far
to be here.

2.
Things know you.
That’s how ot starts.
chalk on the sidewalk,
pansy by the garage.
Then things say their names,
moraine, steeple, pussy willow.
Yes, it’s all beginning to work.
Morning anthem,  
Get up and see.

3.  
So there is still some freedom left,  
between your nostrils and your diaphragm  
the kingdom spreads  
rich and fertile,  
true.  

    The true  
outside is inside.  
As I think you always knew.

4.  
Who dreams us when we dream?  
In the old days people knew the answer:  
sky. Why else would it be there,  
shielding and shining and raining?  
And when winter comes  
we dream a house  
and creep inside.
5.
So many questions.
A car goes by outside--
where is it going?
Suppose we had to know,
really had to, or spend
the whole day in doubt.
Who is driving?
What is on their mind?
Now tell me who dreams
my dreams in me.
Or do I have to work all the time?

14 September 2020
Now is
not the same
as time.
time is an arm,
now a hand
at mst.

Touch me
it says.
Now reaches out,
you feel it on your skin.

14 September 2020
= = = = =

Something about the place.
A point where sounds conjoin, feel at home, live between the ridges, reverberate.

It looks calm where the road forks and the stream runs fast, but once there were three mills and a hotel. on this placid stretch of woods and grass. They are gone, but the sound remains, ghost sounds, like Bach’s music in that church in Leipzig, or the sound of the sea all round you when you read the Bible with any care. There is no silence here and all sound is more.

15 September 2020
WAITING

1.
Wait for the water.
Swim at noon.
Miracles happen,
a woman answers the door
and it’s someone you know,
friends everywhere.
The water isn’t ready yet,
things know when to flow,
when to lie doggo in time
as they used to say
in another time, a smaller
island. Wait,
the bird is waiting too,
adolescents walking on the road,
all of us. Her road,
the one that leads
in time water to us.
2. This information is just for you. I can’t help it, I look up at the sky and remember the specifics of our conversation, wordless, far apart, rain glistening on the windows, all the pretty cars going by.

3. Pardon me, I’m just letting, letting the words take me there, there where the water comes from. I’m not impatient I just want to see for myself the colors of its genesis, the shine of origin. And then I’ll go on waiting--
will you wait with me?
Is there time in this
hour for both of us?

4.
Just following, as I said,
Sometimes my shadow
goes in front of me,
an eerie feeling, isn’t it,
as kif it knew better than I do
where there is to go,
where we have to go.
But I have to follow,
he word that came before
summons the one the comes next,
I hurry to attend,
to leap that silence where they meet.

5.
Far off I hear chainsaws in the trees,
modern vexations in ancient woods--
the city’s not the only place
of acoustic strife. Listen anywhere and time creeps out of the air and presses in your ears. Airs carry menace. No sound in a vacuum. What am I waiting for?

6.
I wait for water, the tree waits wit me. I mean from the hot water faucet, it means from the sky. Amiable, we wait together. Somewhere they are getting ready to answer us, whoever they are. Waiting is a technology of its own.

15 September 2020
I’ve gotten where I meant to go, 
are you still with me? 
The door has closed behind me, 
the sanctuary is dim with natural light-- 
colored glass, polished brass, 
luster of old wood.

But no altar yet. 
What form will it be, 
what Platonic solid 
says the most to me 
right now, right here 
in the intense uncertainty 
of the living day?

Because it’s day in here too, 
time doesn’t stop at the threshold, 
Altars have to be the right shape, 
pure as a prime number, 
capable of supporting 
the immense weight
of a single piece of bread,
a cup of, well, I’m not sure
it will be wine. Water
turns into all of us,
and we’re here too
pressing against the altar
pressing on each other,
the little weight of us,
so needy, so thirsty,
allk our lives. Help me
roll away this rock.
Help me squeeze the cloud.

15 September 2020
Look right into the dark and see, she said and I said Why? and she explained the targets of the night, the things that look like stars outside but in here take a different form, just look. I heard no crow call to tell me she was right, but even here crows don’t talk at night so I had to decide by myself. I like well enough being told what to do, but this, or she, was different and I doubted.

II.
Still, I dared to be obedient again and looked and looked and what I saw took shapes
inside me: freighter on rough sea, long-legged
shadow galloping
through suburban woods, church
ablate with colored lights
but I see that all the time.
What was different was the hand
reaching out towards me,
elegant, relaxed—was it hers?
I waited till it touched me
before I let myself wake up.

16 September 2020
Let me see
where I have gone
an old kingdom
in the mountains
lost long ago
into another language.
Tin steeple in moonlight!

2. Down Crescent to the sea,
the marshes minded me
I think, cat-tails, green heron.

3. Fire house’s glistening brass pole,
nobody on it or in it,
the biggest door you ever saw,
only a spotted dog.

16 September 2020
TRAVELOGUE

I never saw a tiger in Bengal
or rode a gondola in Venice.

But I saw a ghost in the garden
right where the wisteria
meets and joins the old brick wall.

Makes me think travel
is for the unimaginative.

Everything else
is actually right here.

16 September 2020
ON THE LAWN

Figure all in white
cross-legged perfectly still.
Personish from afar.
A Buddha statue made of cloth?
Is that what we all are?
A laundry bag, a paper Everest,
a book turned inside out?

Ah window, window,
you give on fairyland again
where all the gold
is made of light, and any thing,
any blessed thing, can
celestially be anything at all.
At will.

But whose?
The figure doesn’t move
until I finish all my guessing
and then it does, just enough
to prove it can. Fool me again,
be perfectly what I can’t know.
When I look back, the white has turned red, is bent forward over something it is studying some scripture I will never read.

16 September 2020
OF DREAM
towards a new hypnology

1.
Dream is a stern schoolmaster.

The naiads of Malibu
were not on offer,
Waikiki nowhere to be found.

Instead a science lesson,
viscous transparent fluid
in a slender glass tube--
behavior of, in such
and such conditions.

Could that be my brain
trying on a new image of itself?

I flow slowly
but I flow far
and thick with light.
2.
No, or maybe. But maybe we have been wrong about dreams all along--a dream is a social event, maybe even societal: we join with unknown others in a language all humans speak.

Dreams don’t need therapists, analysts--they need ethnographers to study how my dreams are your dreams too, whoever you all are dreaming the music and magic of this seemingly so private dream with me.

3.
In dream
I am a part of a conversation. Study me the dream, o scientist, the truly last frontier,
the door we have been afraid to open
since Jonah dreamt we was
inside a fish
and the religion of a million
people changed.

17 September 2020
It’s not all done yet. There are still some words inside, song birds in a silver cage. Hold the morning firmly in your teeth, squirm on your webstool and begin. This is how it started you. They said something in your head and you shouted back suddenly out loud, out here, and it began. Out here where those who know you not can read the mind that meant it, whatever it was. And you by now might not even remember.

17 September 2020
In the old days 
white meant danger,  
the leper van 
dragging the poor 
Chinese laundryman away--
my old uncles saw that, 

and white-coated doctors 
lobotomizing teenage misfits, 
and the snows in August 
that bad year in New England 
and earlier still those ghost- 
pale Europeans sneaking 
ashore in Gosnold and Jamestown 
and before you know it 
we were all mostly whitish, 
white and dangerous. 
Melville caught on first-- 
the whale meant white 
supremacy, and white means wrong.

17 September 2020
THE SECRET TRIBE

I dreamt a small tribe of Native americans. They lived on Long Island and still do. When the Europeans started sneaking in, the tribal elders intuited that these were not settlers, they were invaders. Taking thought, they soon decided not to combat--they knew they would lose, knew that their old ways were finished, and so they took them inside. So that: at the present moment the tribe is still intact. Ghey live together, nlot on a reservation, but in a single neighborhood in Maspeth, Queens, New York itself. There in an area of a few square blocks of middle-class suburban houses the tribe persists. The men work almost exclusively in the chemical
industry, as alboers, technicians, scientists. They come home at night and are themselves again. As they grow older, they are initiated more and more into tribal religion and world view. They speak their own language at home, but never teach it, never make public acknowledgement of their identity, never say Indians, never even say we. In this long sincere duplicity their freedom rests.

17 September 2020

_The dream was on the night of the 13/14 September 2020. In the dream the tribe was called the Quachadke._
Clover at her heels
lover at her knee
over her shoulders a shimmer of stars,

vertical testimony
erotic rheology
revealing boundary-less dream,

we live by appearances, disappearances.

18 September 2020
Who knows best.
the chalice
or the alkahest,
chasuble or wizard’s peak?

Guess your way to God--
doesn’t that make sense,
or isn’t that what sense is for,
to know the road by feel,
ignore the snickering figure
by the all-too-open door?

In folds green the land is dressed,
a limber walker surfs
up and down the glacial hills,
finds a bower where some frau
*old German word for goddess) has woven grape vines over pale pinewood pergolas--nothing lasts,
even the hills get tired and stretch out some autumn night all flat,
flat and possible and still green. Rosh ha-Shana, the year begins when the season’s over, the corn is cut, the apples counted.

18 September 2020
So where is magic now,
and where is science when the rain
won’t fall on California and the snow
melts on the beaches of Greenland,
the mermaids getting ready for their tryst?

Out of control they say about fires
as if we had the wit or even will
let alone the ability to
control anything at all.

18 September 2020
In just one tree out my window
the wind is busy fussing
while all the other trees are still.
What does this say? What I call fussing
is the universal language of reality,
movement, irritation, consolation, repose.
So many words for what the wind
says so soft and quick.

18 September 2020
Start again.
The mirror sneers
at those who pout.
Those wrinkles
are going somewhere,
mapping a territory,
writing a book.

2.
Age aims.
Time is going somewhere,
time has something on its mind.

3.
Think of the desert:
thousands of years the wind
has been combing the sand,
arranging, lifting, shifting,
heaping up and smoothing down.
A day will come not far from now
when all its work will be done—
every grain of sand will be
at last in its proper place.
The wind will rest, the rain will fall,
the grass will grow.
Sahara will be savannah then,
prairie, farm land, I hear already
e cattle bellow in the rain.

18 September 2020
Cooler than yesterday
that’s all we ever need,
flute in the bedroom
and voices outside--now
is always enough
if you hold it the right way up.

18.IX.20
In the Tauric Chersonese
the story came to rest.
The hero kicked his sandals off,
the goddess wrapped some clouds
around her and the sailors slept.
We are the vertical ones
so all day all life long,
how good it is to be for once
horizontal with eyes closed.
We all know that story
so at that point we close the book.

18.IX.20
Whisper my name into the crook of your elbow as if you were stifling a cough.

The name, once mine, will course through your veins back into your heart—

your heart, from which (or whom) all names rise to be spoken.

2.
This is how we begin. This is language, the Latin word for love.

3.
Wind stops me right there, slams the door open, here, before I commit the sin of understanding
what I do not understand.
Enough has been said
to lead us both astray
then lead us home.
Joyous, your arteries
give me back to me.

18.IX.20
Red Hook
Everything takes an hour more or less. That’s what *hora* means,

the length of now, plash of the fountain, skitter of dead leaves across the pavement, sun on a brick wall,

I tremble with presence, no clock ever stops.

18.IX.20
Red Hook
LIBER DAMNÆ

1.
Book of the woman
lost into color,
all the revisions
of the light
shifted the shape of her
towards us and past me,
and the light knew her
like glass
so that my words
reached out and reached
out and touched
only the cold smooth of
all that she was.
And down the streets
of the dream white
mail trucks hurtled
in trafficless silence.
2.
There were three texts that had somehow to be compressed together—not by picking and choosing but through a massive silent twist or pressure process of its own, so that the three would become choicelessly one.

The texts were different colors: one pale, two dark and they were like shallow bowls, pie crusts, the words clear. I watched her hands arrange them fitting one on top of the other, the text was pale, her hands paler. Then something started and darkness shrouded whatever was going on. And what came out is this.
3.
So now it’s up to me
to make something more,
not just dream smatterings.

I have to reclaim
the noble spacious distances
between all the words
of the original,
the texture of emptiness,
artifice, ligature,
the feel of forward in a classic text,
epic or animal.

I want it to be enough
to wake and see the wind in the trees,
the light forgiving me
into the timeless present,
but those images persist,

three must be one,
she must be lost
into what she has spoken
or made me speak,
lost so that the text
alone is left, and she herself
lingers in her own way
behind the glass,
smiling in her own eyes,
wind on its way.

4.
Am I done,
is the music ready?

Arsis and thesis,
where is the downbeat
that tells me to step,
to stop, the light foot
Duncan got from Bowra got from Pindar,

it’s not all dancing, is it,
my fingers clumsy at the keyboard
but the tones are true?
In holy sleep the felonies are healed,
I wake to say so, empowered
by the Lost Woman
who is everywhere, lost
from grasp into gravity itself,
I’m bantering theology,
it’s not all up to me, you know,
I’m just trying to peel apart
the baked pages and read
the book that woke me,
no cover on it but the words themselves,
I’m just trying to catch the tune,
it’s always only the tune that tells.

19 September 2020
AMARYLLIS

A flower
and an old
French song,
o Lingua, Lingua,
how can I learn
to sing
without music,
can I word it
a few more years,
wind in the trees
be my breath,
saying my song?

19 September 2020
One tree out there
always seems to have
all the wind in it,
its leaves heave sand shimmer
when other trees are still.
And it’s almost the tallest
tree out there--
what is, who is, this
dancer of a tree?
I’m not sure the name
will help me, but I’d like
to know it, to praise it
with the name someone
long ago gave it, by now
it might almost be true enough.

19 September 2020
Am I anyone you ever knew, night of stars, afternoon of the clouds? Time spins us out onto different spools. ready for someone else’s weaving.

19 September 2020
NOTABLE DISTANCES

1. The fever plants of the Tampa coast help the music to decide. Whistle or wander, warble or wait.

Wade

    with me

in the shadows.

Shallows.

We belong to what we hear.

2. The notation is usually accurate, the performers
sober and alert, The cellist hides behind her instrument, the blatant trumpeter of course has to blare on even though a modest type himself. (But why choose brass?)

Outside, the low wind stimulates the chemical habits of those mystery plants said to cure faints and fevers--brassica family, like leafy kale but pale. The sea celebrates just beyond the quiet leaves.

3.
We need these things. It can’t all be Chopin, Debussy, another kind of rigor is required, growl of granite, lust of limb, someday they’ll let us out of school.
4. 
Music for midnight—what kind if you had to choose? 
Wind or water? Name that tree? 
Which king of France built the coast of Normandy?

To be simple about it, 
the Hungarian prairie is very far away. And yet.

5. 
Is it cold enough to be tomorrow? 
What did they mean when they asked that? 
Fine tune your sweaters before breakfast. 
buy roses from the south? 
Radiator’s warm, fridge gurgling.
6.
We’re still here for a little while, 
as I heard a wise man say 
as we stood together on the plain 
counting hilltops on horizon, 
here a while and then an answer, 
condescends. Descends I think 
was meant but there goes 
that music again, this or kiss, 
albatross or arabesques, help 
or harry, or marry, or just 
this sun in calm trees now, 
blue ointment of sky 
a function of our longitude. 
Far away as it is, I pray 
I mean I think I hear the sea.

20 September 2020
Can’t even make the same mistake twice, Heraclitus,
mistakes mount up, they keep count, each one gets worse
until the last, lost continent of everything you ever meant,
incoherent ocean of again.

20 September 2020
A ROAR OF GRATITUDE

*for Vesna*

You gave me dragons,
you gave me words
I couldn’t read,
couldn’t even say
out loud but words
that said what I meant
and said it to so many
people I have never met.
You made me speak
Dragon talk, made a bridge
over the turbulent ocean
of all our differences, over
distance, a bridge over silence
well-guarded by dragons.

20/21 September 2020
The antithesis of the obvious is a low undersea mountain cave in its side, I mean a word spoken in sleep by a person sleeping alone. Or do I mean sunlight, we see everything it shows but not itself? Is there an antithesis to anything? And from the dark of the Bible an answer whispers: a brother to his brother.

21 September 2020
Too simple, such.
Need more black keys
in that tune,
sharps and flats,
the misery in melody
that carries it all
the way home
to music’s heaven:
the change in us.

21 September 2020
Be mean, Molly,
Poldy
needs the chagrin.

21.IX.20
The runner makes the path, right? The bird makes the sky. Trees talk to one another under the confidential ground—

the wind in their leaves is for us, gentle love songs they hum to us—
their real words silent

speak from root to root.

21 September 2020
I thought I was telling the truth but it was only me.

21.IX.20
Things sometimes get too far apart and then we require a troubadour to rise and sing them back together again. This is the secret of poetry. Without it no ship could ever cross the sea.

21.IX.20
I mean a forest
is a conversation—
aren’t you?

21.IX.20

Or, qua Lune:

I mean a forest
aren’t you
conversation too?
Showcase emeralds sparkling and I want so badly to give them to you. But they are waves rolling in sunlight and the sea is far.

21.IX.20
MUSIC OFF

Are there voices in the horn? Why do I hear what no one says?

In the woods again. Wood used to mean mad. hearing voices not even in your head

just there, out there in the dark we move, stumbling over the roots that sound like words.

21 September 2020
[hearing from another room Vivaldi’s e minor concerto for cello and bassoon.]
UNDER THE SEEMING

Milarepa

under a leaf

sheltered—

himself and a friend
from the rain,
the leaf no bigger
and they no smaller
still they sheltered
beneath one leaf

2.
the leaf
a word
sheltered
them from the rain,
from the seeming

3.
to dwell in
o twist
the story:
in the seeming
they sheltered
from the seeming—

miracle of Milarepa,
the mind large
enough to shelter under,

the radiant seemingless
safe beneath all seeming.

21 September 2020
Red Hook
[IN LIBRA]

walked in and the wind
was calm. The names of things
though clattered round the head,
occipital fairytales trying
for frontal rationality.
Fat chance. It’s mostly dream
anyway, the thick dream
called the dictionary. As if.
As if words were things
and were there, here,
to be with us and comfort us
as we limp fown the mountainside,
who am I fooling, the meek
hillock of the day to day.

2.
The shadows under big trees
are richer and deeper than wine
must be for those who drink
but do not chalice it. The dark
is sumptuous, full of subtle,
touches and departures,
bright eyes suddenly seen
seeing me I thought I saw.

3.
Wouldn’t it be useful if
you could look back suddenly
over your shoulder and see
what you’d been thinking just
a few moments back? As if
the thinking left a trace out
there in matter world, sidewalks
and shadows, crowds of people
you thought you had forgotten?

4.
Let us suppose, the pompous magus
declared, thAt the world right now,
this very instant is the sum
total of what every human in it
thought ten seconds back.
And not just humans. I declined
his supposition, slept on,
a causeless victim of someone else’s dream.
5. That’s a gloomy way of putting it, sun in Libra and cold nights. In my dream an inch of snow lay on the porch, wake up! is the solution. But there is no problem. Or none out there. but much further away. Why does power make those who wield it hate and hurt the ones they rule? Send me your answer by Capricorn when the fang of weather really bites.

6. Remember the rosary a prayer on each bead and no reason to stop, round and around. A year is like that, any day can be a pause for breath or take a rest. Or say a different prayer.

22 September 2020
Ladies and gents
I am the oldest
cchild you’ll ever see,
nine decades of pure
fantasy. The only diff
is I know it and maybe
you do not. If so, grow
young along with me.

22 September 2020
If the words say it for me, what am I doing in this dance? Am I the floor, or the wall some shy youth leans against, half-hiding from his desires?

23 September 2020
The trees are thick
green fur today
at their lushest, lastest.
Equinox has come and gone,
the harbor here is empty,
not even the sea. All green
on the way to gone. But such
soft seeming in their fur--
my sight cuddles in it
homing, mama of the world.

23 September 2020
The little time the day has left for being something else—even at first morning. Wash the night away and see. Use it wisely, minute squeezed out after minute. But what is wisdom when a clock has wheels and we stumble mumbling to keep up?

23 September 2020
DOLCE FAR...

You need a slow day
to lug out that instrument,
bass fiddle of a new idea
and pluck at it till it seems
at least to your own ears
to sing.

   Earth is close to heaven
at least in comparison
with anywhere else—there,
that’s something to work with,
the astronomy of theology,
leave your telescope behind.
All you need is will to word.

Word it like a warble in the woods,
word it like a leaf.
Trees turn into books
when they die, some of them do,
leaves we say, and morning pages.
But I distract. Here we were on the way to heaven and ideas ensnared our ankles and we fell. The Fall of Man happens a billion times a day, every time we think then turn away from what we thought.

23 September 2020
A SIMPLE SYMPHONY

Now is so long ago.
The mysteries of Egypt
in these young trees.
I sat once by the water
and i all went away.
The politics of intimacy,
shadow of a red rock.
Before dawn it’s anywhere,
the clock rolls downhill.
There are two parts to anything
but I can give you only one.

2.
There, my quickest symphony.
I learned it from the radio
when I was five years old.
Or ten. Or last Tuesday night,
remember? Right now
is the sluggish slow movement,
just wait. It’s all here already
but like everything else
nobody ever notices.

3.
The spooks along the Nile set sail
magic this way across the sea
and reach us here, cleanse
their images in the cold
Adirondack flow, mercies
of our little streams. Dream
remit the images of day,
a little polished, a little stained
by all the otherness inside.
Stag brays in the woods, fox
shouts in ferns, crow decides.
The music can stop now--
the truth is out, the generosity.
One word spells a happy life: Give.

24 September 2020
Being a birthday is always half asleep again. The REM sleep of the new-born child happens in the mind turned back over its shoulder—the mind has muscles too, and brittle bones and firm. Awake, I whisper to myself, put the dream away, today you have to be you again.

24 September 2020
Pallor of the mountain sky
I heard Nietzsche talking in the attic
to someone, maybe the squirrel,
they try to get in everywhere
as winter walks towards us,
Fritz was relaxed for a change,
light-hearted almost, discussed
briefly the role of the imagination
in eating an apple--our apples
are stored up here and his words
were sometimes muffled by one
he was enjoying as he lectured
the fortunate beast or bird up there
or just the shadow of the tree
slaps through the tiny window.
Strange, attics, so close
to the sky, are the darkest
rooms in the house. His own
light shines better there.

24 September 2020
Enough said.
The poltergeists of politics
are rattling the spoons again.
A moment’s quiet
might amend the world.
Try it and see. But first
put all the guns away.

24.IX.20
1.
A warmer day
a quiet green storm
calms the trees,

yes, light has weather too.
this bright calm intense
sweeps doubt away.
Or some of the doubts
that spoil the flavor of the day.

2.
Food and weather,
is that all I have
to say, to talk about
on the way to work,
a work that never
goes away thank god?
3. 
I’m trying to confess that what the trees eat makes me strong. Not a leaf is stirring—nobody disagrees.

4. 
A suite of seeming serenades the day, evening in the morning, quiet tune of light, sleepy waking, dream for breakfast. Life without a clock is sunlight in my fingers.
When I first saw her
I thought she’d be a nun.
I saw it in her eyes,
intensity of yearning,
intensity of doubt
I could tell she doubted
everything and everyone,
doubted the whole world
and wanted only the perfect,
the thing we’re taught in school
to call God, and taught too
that nuns are married to Christ.
And I saw that she had not yet
found Christ or God or what might be
the Lord or Lady worth her
radiant intensity. Such eyes!

25 September 2020)
Trail across the desert
gold and silver
Canadian border
who is really America
left for a nickel
pure silver
ashtray tiny from Hokkaido
silver smooth a serpent
on the little lid on a leaf--
mark what the dream tells
there is no other vademecum
chaste as your eyes
allow the loom to weave
no foot on the treadle and yet
spin me with your eyes.

2.
Spin me a tree
a beech for bravery
a book meant beech tree once
all literature a scribble down
fast as poor mind can
the story stories the tree tells
even now out our window
the beech is waving
when all is still.

3.
Imagine this whole world
the engine of a vehicle
going somewhere
can I come too?
peer under the hood of all things
hear the purr of the engine
the coughing now and then
of our blood its gasoline
our breath the vapor it needs
it’s frightening to be so close
so close to the roar and the heat
only in dream do you dare
to lift the hood and look.
4.
So much has been changing
but children still wait for busses
carry them to what is called the truth
as much of it as they need
to get married and get a job
the other way round it they can
and birds still presume to sing
just last afternoon a noble wren
my hearing is not good
sing louder, river,
flow faster, oriole
the bus is on its way
sidewalk shows the difference
when girls hop their skirts float
beautiful wings in the air
when boys jump they stomp the ground
ugly ugly with the sound of take
wait with me and hold my mind
the bus will come and cure us soon.
5.
if there were a number
it would have to be me
as it is though the river flows
east southeast and then due south
the ocean is always listening
always hearing our confession
I have walked along the ocean floor
there are hard places down there
shapely pinnacles and grottoes
where the frail wings of fish
negotiate the mystery of air
where is it in all this splendid rush
silver and gold the sunlight folds
and we do breathe
we make our choices
they dream the land we dream the sea
simple as a lawn party
polite and with sweet tea
Latin quotation I start he finishes
people remind you of dead friends
close to the border now
the car rides through the sky
we are taught the truth by cartoons
we’ll be there soon wherever it is
you decide they tell me
no you, it’s your ashtray
you brought it from Japan.

26 September 2020
SATURDAY

You don't have to do anything today except be.

Yet they dare call it a day off.

26.IX.20
A grotto always makes you think of somewhere else, a grotto is a thing you go to to be deep and quiet with it, rest there and start thinking, even that old-fashioned kind of thinking they call prayer.

* 

A geode is a grotto too. one that has a will to go to you, to be there quietly and let you in, even if there is no freshet but your thoughts, no mountain spring except the way its crystals catch light and make it twinkle, that is, make it move. And all light moves, though we can’t see it.
But the crystal can, and tells
the tiny grotto what it sees
and lets it let your vision in.
Doorway with no door,
entrance that is forever going in.

26/27 September 2020
GROTTO, 2

Is there a word out there
that says the sound inside the stone?
It winks to me that you’re
the one to say it.
we Americans are so explicit,
we have such clear voices,

so tell us, tell us the word we are.

*
That much I trust Moses for--
he went to, goes to,
the mountain to learn what to say.

I stand dumb there too,
leaving it up to the rock
to teach me my lessons,
stand and wait and read and write,
what else can an old child do?

27 September 2020
Stepping off the ladder is a wonder dance, between the last rung and the nearby earth just a dozen inches of pure space but such a marvel in that passage, coming back from mansard roof or down from paradise and being here again, here, a foot swings low in quiet enstasy.

27 September 2020
So call it a cave you can set on a desk, a fountain of dry water, yes, there is such a thing, we think it all the time and cure our thirst, or let it be just points of color, each point a different destination aiming as if some foreign language wanted to sing in you too.

27 September 2020
EPITAPH FOR ANYONE

No one will ever
be me again
but I will be everyone.

27.IX.20
My eyes that used
to spin the wheels
and gobble up the road
don’t let me drive.

Drive no more
but I can ride
and spell the words
as trees flash by.

27 September 2020
SEPTEMBER SABBATH

for Crichton

I hear the fridge
gurglie its quiet business.
Few cars pass, soft,
no church to go to,

the trees at rest.
Only the gently
articulate beech
is saying something.

So much green!
But some paleness
promises their work
will soon let them rest,

these immense flowers
will let their petals take
on pretty colors and fall.
And I remember now
how you took a blue flower
and petal by petal
offered it to the sea
between your shore and my island

and as you did you thought of me.
I thank you for that thinking.
it makes me feel noble,
upright, a little like a tree.

27 September 2020
HALF A BALL OF WAX

for Ann Lauterbach

I wonder if the earth
is like this too
if we lifted it open—

the famous fierce fire
at the core that science
argues, maybe it’s just
a little candle flame
whose flicker shapes
all time and all our lives,

as a single idea can churn
vast thinking and doing
in the mind, or as in
a lover’s thought the simple
silly name of the beloved
lights up a whole life.

27 September 2020
SUMMATION

asked for by Heide Hatry

No need to shout
give all that you can

expect nothing

praise everyone
and thing you can

answer all questions
write everything.

Write everything.

28 September 2020
for Nancy Goldring

The streets of somewhere
you know where
the shadows are golden as they fall
queer as music on the empty street
so full of something going on--

is color an accident of love,
the way things light up their very selves
the luster of their surfaces
when someone -you-- looks at them
attentive as sunlight

then make us see too?
Is that how it is,
in the old country
where most of our light got made?

The streets of somewhere
are full of slants, bare walls,
windows messaging with sheer surface,
the streets of somewhere
where you walked around
your eyes sleeping deep
in that dream we call seeing.

28 September 2020
There is a hook
in very book
usually sturdy
but you never know.

From it a rope may
be slung, down which
you can rappel
(I think the word is)
down the cliff faces,
gullies, grottoes,
caves of its meaning.
Its meanings.

A printed page
is sunshine glazing
a vast wilderness
spread out for you
bold athletes of interpretation.

28 September 2020
If you lose or mislay something the first place to look is in the mirror.

28.IX.20
How long do I have to be the line asked. Until I come home the circle answered.

28.IX.20
Subway door shutting
so smooth my
hand can’t stop it
I’m trapped by another
destination north away
from what i mean, blue
slick door shut because
two tiny children ran by
and startled me. All in white
the first one was, then slightly
bigger in reds nd brown.
I was afraid they’d trot out
the door and be lost
but I am the one who’s lost
crowded train growling
all the wrong way. So now
who do I have to be?

28 September 2020
= = = = =

Don’t decide—
just write it down;
All the mistakes
will still lead you on.
Water the growth
with guesses, blunders,
hopeful lies—
the grain of truth
knows how to grow
through all our weathers.
Just keep it wet with words
and enough sunlight of silence.

28 September 2020
THE INFANT’S PLEA

I want to watch you
change your underwear,
want to watch you ride
that crocodile, want to know
how things get done, how
you turned into you so
I can turn maybe into me.

I want to watch you sing
your song, your lips seem to me
to say more than the words do
and the way the tune
makes soft movements
in your throat, let me stroke
my fingers on your neck
to feel what singing is,

what it does to the one
who sings, I want to watch
you do everything, if I see
with my own eyes what you
do with your own body
I will surely learn how
to stand and walk and even sing.
Teach me to sing,
let me watch, touch, listen,
hold me while I try to sing too.

28 September 2020
Wait for me at the corner where the street runs out and a Dutch meadow stretches stretches to the sea, yes, just like painting. I hurry past the sleeping cars, the rusted mailbox, the cat somebody is looking for if I believe the poster stapled to the phone pole still made from a single tree. I can see you there, back to me, watching for whale spouts, tattered sails, submarines, you’re always waiting for something, not just for me. I’m thinking fast as I can, pitiful pace, stumbling oven images here where the sidewalk runs out and gravel gets us to the cross that marks the city’s end
and where the waiting game begins.
You hear me coming now,
turn and see me, smile,
then look back at the forgiving sea.

29 September 2020
EDGEWISE

Yes, I was born along
the edge of things,
the marsh that holds the city,
migrant birds singing foreign
in the cattail grass, the whole
horizon a closed eye. Edgy,
they say, always on edge, yes,
how could it be otherwise.

2.
The letters I wait for
I have to mail myself,
stay up late to write them,
wait for the mailman
to bring them back
romanced by otherness and far.
Or, to be true to my seaside start,
I have a long, long conversation
with an oyster, the rugged kind,
from the south, makes me do
all the talking, I am both sides
at once and no shell to keep me safe.
3.
What a way to talk about a friend. As if the whole world
were a waitress
you’re flirting with
in some midnight dive.
What a way to think
about philosophy, theology,
Gothic spires, sleek
hips of Aphrodite by Phidias.
You get me all confused--
one night Olson and I
walked all the way
along the Santander corridor
to the Bay of Biscay to see
Britain far away, walked back
to his place in the Fort.
Weird how distances disperse
while humans talk,
cup of black coffee, hidden Grail.
4.
I hope I’m happening you.
You’re there,
between the closet and the sink,
cigarette smoke dangling above
but who’s smoking?
We don’t do that anymore,
it’s like the Roller Derby
or Robin Hood, lost in time.
But there you are, intimate
authority, leaning on the sink.
If it were up to me, every
kitchen would be full of chairs
so we could sit and think
about the food, and what we mean
by feeding it to one another,
the whole epistemology of choosing
what to eat. Dark matters.
It’s your fault. You make me think.
And when the polar bear begins to sing, we know that paradise is close, the opera will begin again, the ice float in our absinthe and the Pope will be from Italy again. Why polar bear, you ask? Why not, I reply, one fur is as good as another, call it the grizzly if you’d rather or skip the bear altogether and just sing. You do it. Sing.

29 September 2020
Truth is messy, lies are compact. That’s why we go to High School to enroll in the Almost-Fact.

29.IX.20
Eros
    also is a messenger
brings you together
but the bed you love on
is floating subtly
night after night
to bring you both
go the singular destination
Love had in mind
all the while.

29 September 2020
Remember to remember
the infinite distances
between any you and any other
and that infinite can mean
endlessly vast or very small,
and then remember what you mean
when you look at the bright
face of a new friend
or learn that an old one has died.
Remember that distance
is a music that we sing—
be close, be close to them in mind
and everything will come out well.

29 September 2020
If I were the sea
and if I had a son
who would it be?
If I were the sea
would I be myself
the only one, all
the globe in my
wet hands or am I
several ones at once,
one or many, father
or mother? I must wait
until my son grows up
then one day he’ll tell me.

29 September 2020
CROW

It’s not about me
not about me--
that’s what the crow
is always calling,
warning, guiding, look
all around you,
choose another path
through the woods,
hurry home now,
think a different thought,
clean your mind
with pure listening,
come, go, it’s not
about me, not about me.

29 September 2020
Three armloads of hay for one baby lamb—who do I think I am who can barely tell a turkey from a tree?

All things move in their own way except for stones. si I may be a stone.

Things wait for me to decide.

29 September 2020
Red Hook
= = = = =

Watch the world happen—it wants you to.
Every breeze an invitation, invocation. a welcome whispered on your skin

It all wants to be touched, pondered, written about. gloried in, seen.

You were born to behold it. Take hold of your pen and see some more.

29 September 2020
Red Hook
IT RAINED HARD
we needed it
after the rain
what else was true?

On stone he rested
till he knew
that change
meant suffering

and change itself
cures suffering,
the stone was dry
where he had been

the leaves were wet,
still dripping
though the sky
was slowly clearing

above him from the north.

30 September 2020
The beech tree is talking again
telling all animals should be free
but no harm in setting aside
woodland and prairie where they
and they alone can work out
their destinies without our wills
intruding on theirs. Leave alone.

30.IX.20
DECIPHERMENTS

If you weren’t so like yourself
I wouldn’t be me--
that’s the oldest song in the world
but nobody sings.

2.
When you were a little kid
skipping up the alley
past the lilacs and pussy-willows
where was Moses with his books of stone?

3.
Clouds are commentaries,
nothing more.
Sometimes they bring rain
as our reward
when we have thought the matter through
and brought the silence safely home.
4.
I thought it was done
but it was still blue.
A bear in the backyard
trees too are hiding something
it is to our advantage
not to behold. There,
Pascal lays down his pen,
quill from the finest
geese in Normandy.

5.
Evidence abounds.
Big cloud very white
invites attention--
count the birds you see,
be a Roman cheerfully,
numbers keep you from thinking,
almost as good as drinking,
they add up to what goes away,
count the birds o count the birds.

30 September 2020
Feel free with me
do anything you please
but leave my name alone,
untouched, untoyed with,
My name belongs
to someone else, someone
I still have to be.

30.IX.20
LIEBESLIED

for Charlotte

You’ll still be here
when the numbers run out,
you catch the sunlight
as it topples through the trees,
keep the light from breaking.
When the numbers are all gone
the words will linger, answer
all questions, reveal the truth
kept safe in your quiet smile.

30 September 2020